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THE MOST THRILLING

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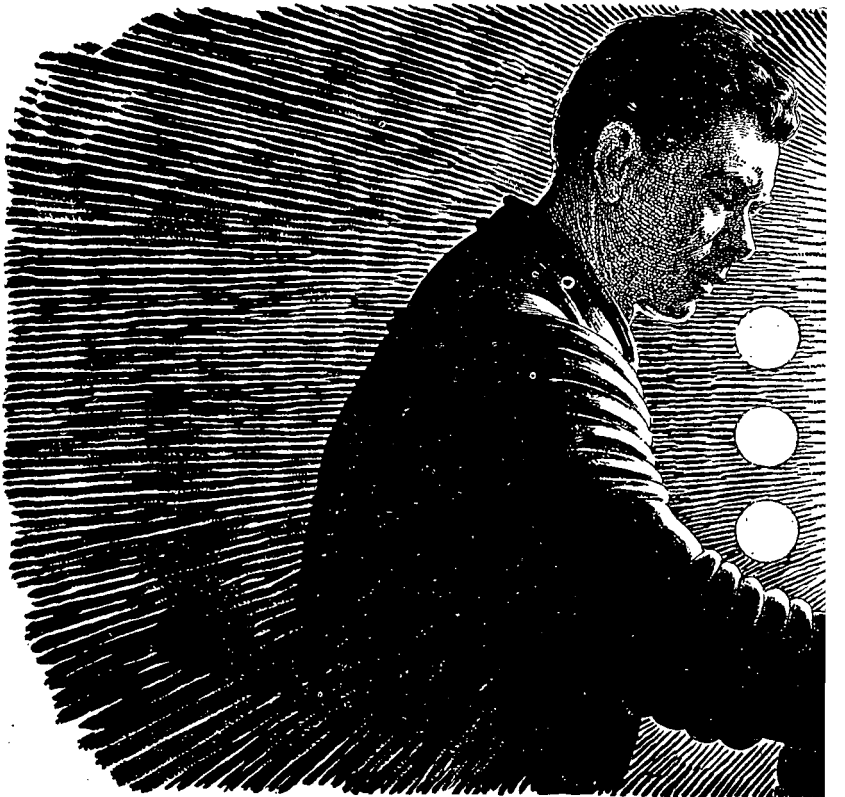

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A British writer takes a familiar theme, laces it with not one—not two—but three swift reverses of plot, and produces a small gem of insight into the mind of a "closed community" man.

THIRTEEN TO

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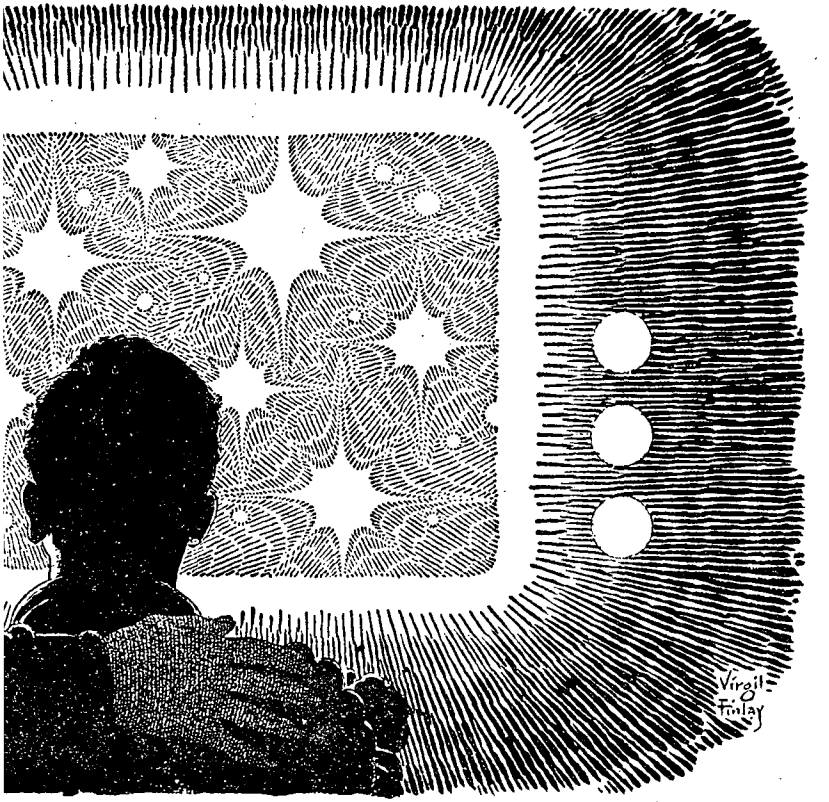

CENTAURUS

By J. G. BALLARD

ABEL KNEW.

Three months earlier, just after his sixteenth birthday, he had guessed, but had been too unsure of himself, too overwhelmed by the logic of his discovery, to mention it to his parents. At times, lying back half asleep in his bunk while his mother crooned one of the old lays to herself, he would deliberately repress the knowledge, but always it came back, nagging at him insistently, forcing

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him to jettison most of what he had long regarded as the real world.

None of the other children at the Station could help. They were immersed in their games in Playroom, or chewing pencils over their tests and homework.

"Abel, what's the matter?" Zenna Peters called after him as he wandered off to the empty store-room on D-Deck. "You're looking sad again."

Abel hesitated, watching Zenna's warm, puzzled smile, then slipped his hands into his pockets and made off, sprinting down the metal stairway to make sure she didn't follow him. Once she sneaked into the store-room uninvited and he had pulled the light-bulb out of the socket, shattered about three weeks of conditioning. Dr. Francis had been furious.

As he hurried along the D-Deck corridor he listened carefully for the doctor, who had recently been keeping an eye on Abel, watching him shrewdly from behind the plastic models in Playroom. Perhaps Abel's mother had told him about the nightmare, when he would wake from a vice of sweating terror, an image of a dull burning disc fixed before his eyes.

If only Dr. Francis could cure him of that dream.

Every six yards down the corridor he stepped through a bulkhead, and idly touched the heavy control boxes on either side of the doorway. Deliberately unfocussing his mind, Abel identified some of the letters above the switches

M-T—R SC—N

but they scrambled into a blur as soon as he tried to read the entire phrase. Conditioning was too strong. After he trapped her in the store-room Zenna had been able to read a few of the notices, but Dr. Francis whisked her away before she could repeat them. Hours later, when she came back, she remembered nothing.

AS USUAL when he entered the store-room, he waited a few seconds before switching on the light, seeing in front of him the small disc of burning light that in his dreams expanded until it filled his brain like a thousand arc lights. It seemed endlessly distant, yet somehow mysteriously potent and magnetic, arousing dormant areas of his mind close to those which responded to his mother's presence.

As the disc began to expand he pressed the switch tab.

To his surprise, the room remained in darkness. He fumbled for the switch, a short cry slipping involuntarily through his lips.

Abruptly, the light went on.

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"Hello, Abel," Dr. Francis said easily, right hand pressing the bulb into its socket. "Quite a shock, that one." He leaned against a metal crate. "I thought we'd have a talk together about your essay." He took an exercise book out of his white plastic suit as Abel sat down stiffly. Despite his dry smile and warm eyes there was something about Dr. Francis that always put Abel on his guard.

Perhaps Dr. Francis knew too?

"THE Closed Community,'" Dr. Francis read out. "A strange subject for an essay, Abel."

Abel shrugged. "It was a free choice. Aren't we really expected to choose something unusual?"

Dr. Francis grinned. "A good answer. But seriously, Abel, why pick a subject like that?"

Abel fingered the seals on his suit. These served no useful purpose, but by blowing through them it was possible to inflate the suit. "Well, it's a sort of study of life at the Station, how we all get on with each other. What else is there to write about?—I don't see that it's so strange."

"Perhaps not. No reason why you shouldn't write about the Station. All four of the others did too. But you called yours 'The Closed Community.' The Station isn't closed, Abel—or is it?"

"It's closed in the sense that we can't go outside," Abel explained slowly. "That's all I meant."

"Outside," Dr. Francis repeated. "It's an interesting concept. You must have given the whole subject a lot of thought. When did you first start thinking along these lines?"

"After the dream," Abel said. Dr. Francis had deliberately sidestepped his use of the word 'outside' and he searched for some means of getting to the point. In his pocket he felt the small plumbline he carried around. "Dr. Francis, perhaps you can explain something to me. Why is the Station revolving?"

"Is it?" Dr. Francis looked up with interest. "How do you know?"

Abel reached up and fastened the plumbline to the ceiling stanchion. "The interval between the ball and the wall is about an eighth of an inch greater at the bottom than at the top. Centrifugal forces are driving it outwards. I calculated that the Station is revolving at about two feet per second."

Dr. Francis nodded thoughtfully. "That's just about right," he said matter-of-factly. He

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stood up. "Let's take a trip to my office. It looks as if it's time you and I had a serious talk."

THE Station was on four levels. The lower two contained the crew's quarters, two circular decks of cabins which housed the 14 people on board the Station. The senior clan was the Peters, led by Captain Theodore, a big stern man of taciturn disposition who rarely strayed from Control. Abel had never been allowed there, but the Captain's son, Matthew, often described the hushed dome-like cabin filled with luminous dials and flickering lights, the strange humming music.

All the male members of the Peters clan worked in Control—grandfather Peters, a white-haired old man with humorous eyes, had been Captain before Abel was born—and with the Captain's wife and Zenna they constituted the elite of the Station.

However, the Grangers, the clan to which Abel belonged, was in many respects more important, as he had begun to realize. The day-to-day running of the Station, the detailed programming of emergency drills, duty rosters and commissary menus, was the responsibility of Abel's father, Matthias, and without his firm but flexible hand the Bakers, who cleaned the cabins and ran the commissary, would never have known what to do. And it was only the deliberate intermingling in Recreation which his father devised that brought the Peters and Bakers together, or each family would have stayed indefinitely in its own cabins.

Lastly, there was Dr. Francis. He didn't belong to any of the three clans. Sometimes Abel asked himself where Dr. Francis had come from, but his mind always fogged at a question like that, as the conditioning blocks fell like bulkheads across his thought trains (logic was a dangerous tool at the Station). Dr. Francis' energy and vitality, his relaxed good humor—in a way, he was the only person in the Station who ever made any jokes—were out of character with everyone else. Much as he sometimes disliked Dr. Francis for snooping around and being a know-all, Abel realized how dreary life in the Station would seem without him.

DR. Francis closed the door of his cabin and gestured Abel into a seat. All the furniture in the Station was bolted to the floor, but Abel noticed that Dr. Francis had unscrewed his chair so that he could tilt it backwards. The huge vacuum-proof cylinder of the doctor's sleeping tank jutted from the

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wall, its massive metal body able to withstand any accident the Station might suffer. Abel hated the thought of sleeping in the cylinder—luckily the entire crew quarters were accident-secure—and wondered why Dr. Francis chose to live alone up on A-Deck.

"Tell me, Abel," Dr. Francis began, "has it ever occurred to you to ask why the Station is here?"

Abel shrugged. "Well, it's designed to keep us alive, it's our home."

"Yes, that's true, but obviously it has some other object than just our own survival. Who do you think built the Station in the first place?"

"Our fathers, I suppose, or grandfathers. Or *their* grandfathers."

"Fair enough. And where were they before they built it?"

Abel struggled with the reductio ad absurdum. "I don't know, they must have been floating around in mid-air!"

Dr. Francis joined in the laughter. "Wonderful thought. Actually it's not all that far from the truth. But we can't accept that as it stands."

The doctor's self-contained office gave Abel an idea. "Perhaps they came from another Station? An even bigger one?"

Dr. Francis nodded encouragingly. "Brilliant, Abel. A first-class piece of deduction. All right, then, let's assume that. Somewhere, away from us, a huge Station exists, perhaps a hundred times bigger than this one, maybe even a thousand. Why not?"

"It's possible," Abel admitted, accepting the idea with surprising ease.

"Right. Now you remember your course in advanced mechanics—the imaginary planetary system, with the orbiting bodies held together by mutual gravitational attraction? Let's assume further that such a system actually exists. O.K.?"

"Here?" Abel said quickly. "In your cabin?" Then he added: "In your sleeping cylinder?"

DR. Francis sat back. "Abel, you do come up with some amazing things. An interesting association of ideas. No, it would be too big for that. Try to imagine a planetary system orbiting around a central body of absolutely enormous size, each of the planets a million times larger than the Station." When Abel nodded, he went on. "And suppose that the big Station, the one a thousand times larger than this, were attached to one of the planets, and that the people in it decided to go to another planet. So they build a smaller Station, about the size of this one, and send it off through the air. Make sense?"

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"In a way." Strangely, the completely abstract concepts were less remote than he would have expected. Deep in his mind dim memories stirred, interlocking with what he had already guessed about the Station. He gazed steadily at Dr. Francis. "You're saying that's what the Station is doing? That the planetary system exists?"

Dr. Francis nodded. "You'd more or less guessed before I told you. Unconsciously, you've known all about it for several years. A few minutes from now I'm going to remove some of the conditioning blocks, and when you wake up in a couple of hours you'll understand everything. You'll know then that in fact the Station is a space ship, flying from our home planet, Earth, where our grandfathers were born, to another planet millions of miles away, in a distant orbiting system. Our grandfathers always lived on Earth, and we are the first people ever to undertake such a journey. You can be proud that you're here. Your grandfather, who volunteered to come, was a great man, and we've got to do everything to make sure that the Station keeps running."

Abel nodded quickly. "When do we get there—the planet we're flying to?"

Dr. Francis looked down at his hands, his face growing sombre. "We'll never get there, Abel. The journey takes too long. This is a multi-generation space vehicle, only our children will land and they'll be old by the time they do. But don't worry, you'll go on thinking of the Station as your only home, and that's deliberate, so that you and your children will be happy here."

He went over to the TV monitor screen by which he kept in touch with Captain Peters, his fingers playing across the control tabs. Suddenly the screen lit up, a blaze of fiery points of light flared into the cabin, throwing a brilliant phosphorescent glitter across the walls, dappling Abel's hands and suit. He gaped at the huge balls of fire, apparently frozen in the middle of a giant explosion, hanging in vast patterns.

"THIS is the celestial sphere," Dr. Francis explained. "The star-field into which the Station is moving." He touched a bright speck of light in the lower half of the screen. "Alpha Centauri, the star around which revolves the planet the Station will one day land upon." He turned to Abel. "You remember all these terms I'm using, don't you, Abel? None of them seems strange."

Abel nodded, the wells of his unconscious memory flooding into his mind as Dr. Francis spoke. The TV screen blanked and then revealed a new picture. They ap-

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peared to be looking down at an enormous top-like structure, the flanks of a metal pylon sloping towards its center. In the background the star-field rotated slowly in a clockwise direction. "This is the Station," Dr. Francis explained, "seen from a camera mounted on the nose boom. All visual checks have to be made indirectly, as the stellar radiation would blind us. Just below the ship you can see a single star, the Sun, from which we set out 50 years ago. It's now almost too distant to be visible, but a deep inherited memory of it is the burning disc you see in your dreams. We've done what we can to erase it, but unconsciously all of us see it too."

He switched off the set and the brilliant pattern of light swayed and fell back. "The social engineering built into the ship is far more intricate than the mechanical, Abel. It's three generations since the Station set off, and birth, marriage and birth again have followed exactly as they were designed to. As your father's heir great demands are going to be made on your patience and understanding. Any disunity here would bring disaster. The conditioning programs are not equipped to give you more than a general outline of the course to follow. Most of it will be left to you."

"Will you always be here?"

Dr. Francis stood up. "No, Abel, I won't. No one here lives forever. Your father will die, and Captain Peters and myself." He moved to the door. "We'll go now to Conditioning. In three hours' time, when you wake up, you'll find yourself a new man."

LETTING himself back into his cabin, Francis leaned wearily against the bulkhead, feeling the heavy rivets with his fingers, here and there flaking away as the metal slowly rusted. When he switched on the TV set he looked tired and dispirited, and gazed absently at the last scene he had shown Abel, the boom camera's view of the ship. He was just about to select another frame when he noticed a dark shadow swing across the surface of the hull.

He leaned forward to examine it, frowning in annoyance as the shadow moved away and faded among the stars. He pressed another tab, and the screen divided into a large chessboard, five frames wide by five deep. The top line showed Control, the main pilot and navigation deck lit by the dime glow of the instrument panels, Captain Peters sitting impassively before the compass screen.

Next, he watched Matthias Granger begin his afternoon inspection of the ship. Most of the passengers seemed reasonably

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happy, but their faces lacked any lustre. All spent at least 2-3 hours each day bathing in the UV light flooding through the recreation lounge, but the pallor continued, perhaps an unconscious realization that they had been born and were living in what would also be their own tomb. Without the continuous conditioning sessions, and the hypnotic reassurance of the sub-sonic voices, they would long ago have become will-less automatons.

Switching off the set, he prepared to climb into the sleeping cylinder. The airlock was three feet in diameter, waist-high off the floor. The time seal rested at zero, and he moved it forward 12 hours, then set it so that the seal could only be broken from within. He swung the lock out and crawled in over the moulded foam mattress, snapping the door shut behind him.

Lying back in the thin yellow light, he slipped his fingers through the ventilator grille in the rear wall, pressed the unit into its socket and turned it sharply. Somewhere an electric motor throbbed briefly, the end wall of the cylinder swung back slowly like a vault door and bright daylight poured in.

QUICKLY, Francis climbed out onto a small metal platform that jutted from the upper slope of a huge white asbestos-covered dome. Fifty feet above was the roof of a large hangar. A maze of pipes and cables traversed the surface of the dome, interlacing like the vessels of a giant bloodshot eye, and a narrow stairway led down to the floor below. The entire dome, some 150 feet wide, was revolving slowly. A line of five trucks was drawn up by the stores depot on the far side of the hangar, and a man in a brown uniform waved to him from one of the glass-walled offices.

At the bottom of the ladder he jumped down onto the hangar floor, ignoring the curious stares from the soldiers unloading the stores. Half-way across he craned up at the revolving bulk of the dome. A black perforated sail, 50 feet square, like a fragment of a planetarium, was suspended from the roof over the apex of the dome, a TV camera directly below it, a large metal sphere mounted about five feet from the lens. One of the guy-ropes had snapped and the sail tilted slightly to reveal the catwalk along the center of the roof.

He pointed this out to a maintenance sergeant warming his hands in one of the ventilator outlets from the dome. "You'll have to string that back. Some fool was wandering along the catwalk and throwing his shadow straight onto the model. I could see it clearly on the TV screen. Luckily no one spotted it."

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"O.K., Doctor, I'll get it fixed." He chuckled sourly. "That would have been a laugh, though. Really give them something to worry about."

The man's tone annoyed Francis. "They've got plenty to worry about as it is."

"I don't know about that, Doctor. Some people here think they have it all ways. Quiet and warm in there, nothing to do except sit back and listen to those hypnodrills." He looked out bleakly at the abandoned airfield stretching away to the cold tundra beyond the perimeter, and turned up his collar. "We're the boys back here on Mother Earth who do the work, out in this Godforsaken dump. If you need any more space cadets, Doctor, remember me."

Francis managed a smile and stepped into the control office, made his way through the clerks sitting at trestle tables in front of the progress charts. Each carried the name of one of the dome passengers and a tabulated breakdown of progress through the psychometric tests and conditioning programs. Other charts listed the day's rosters, copies of those posted that morning by Matthias Granger.

INSIDE Colonel Chalmers office Francis relaxed back gratefully in the warmth, describing the salient features of his day's observation. "I wish you could go in there and move around them, Paul," he concluded, "it's not the same spying through the TV cameras. You've got to talk to them, measure yourself against people like Granger and Peters."

"You're right, they're fine men, like all the others. It's a pity they're wasted there."

"They're not wasted," Francis insisted. "Every piece of data will be immensely valuable when the first space ships set out." He ignored Chalmers' muttered 'If they do' and went on: "Zenna and Abel worry me a little. It may be necessary to bring forward the date of their marriage. I know it will raise eyebrows, but the girl is as fully mature at 15 as she will be four years from now, and she'll be a settling influence on Abel, stop him from thinking too much."

Chalmers shook his head doubtfully. "Sounds a good idea, but a girl of 15 and a boy of 16—? You'd raise a storm, Roger. Technically they're wards of court, every decency league would be up in arms."

Francis gestured irritably. "Need they know? We've really got a problem with Abel, the boy's too clever. He'd more or less worked out for himself that the Station was a space ship, he merely lacked the vocabulary to describe it. Now that we're starting to lift the conditioning blocks

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he'll want to know everything. It will be a big job to prevent him from smelling a rat, particularly with the slack way this place is being run. Did you see the shadow on the TV screen? We're damn lucky Peters didn't have a heart attack."

Chalmers nodded. "I'm getting that tightened up. A few mistakes are bound to happen, Roger. It's damn cold for the control crew working around the dome. Try to remember that the people outside are just as important as those inside."

"Of course. The real trouble is that the budget is ludicrously out of date. It's only been revised once in 50 years. Perhaps General Short can generate some official interest, get a new deal for us. He sounds like a pretty brisk new broom." Chalmers pursed his lips doubtfully, but Francis continued: "I don't know whether the tapes are wearing out, but the negative conditioning doesn't hold as well as it used to. We'll probably have to tighten up the programs. I've made a start by pushing Abel's graduation forward."

"Yes, I watched you on the screen here. The control boys became quite worked up next door. One or two of them are as keen as you, Roger, they'd been programming ahead for three months. It meant a lot of time wasted for them. I think you ought to check with me before you make a decision like that. The dome isn't your private laboratory."

FRANCIS accepted the reproof. Lamely, he said: "It was one of those spot decisions, I'm sorry. There was nothing else to do."

Chalmers gently pressed home his point. "I'm not so sure. I thought you rather overdid the long-term aspects of the journey. Why go out of your way to tell him he would never reach planetfall? It only heightens his sense of isolation, makes it that much more difficult if we decide to shorten the journey."

Francis looked up. "There's no chance of that, is there?"

Chalmers paused thoughtfully. "Roger, I really advise you not to get too involved with the project. Keep saying to yourself: they're-not - going - to Alpha - Centauri. They're here on Earth, and if the government decided it they'd be let out tomorrow. I know the courts would have to sanction it but that's a formality. It's 50 years since this project was started and a good number of influential people feel that it's gone on for too long. Ever since the Mars and Moon colonies failed space programs have been cut right back. They think the money here is being poured away for the amusement of a few sadistic psychologists."

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"You know that isn't true," Francis retorted. "I may hav been over-hasty, but on the whole this project has been scrupulously conducted. Without exaggeration, if you did send a dozen people on a multi-generation ship to Alpha Centauri you couldn't do better than duplicate everything that's taken place here, down to the last cough and sneeze. If the information we've obtained had been available the Mars and Moon colonies never would have failed!"

"True. But irrelevant. Don't you understand, when everyone was eager to get into space they were prepared to accept the idea of a small group being sealed into a tank for 100 years, particularly when the original team volunteered. Now, when interest has evaporated, people are beginning to feel that there's something obscene about this human zoo, what began as a grand adventure of the spirit of Columbus has become a grisly joke. In one sense we've learned too much—the social stratification of the three families is the sort of unwelcome datum that doesn't do the project much good. Another is the complete ease with which we've manipulated them, made them believe anything we've wanted." Chalmers leaned forward across the desk. "Confidentially, Roger, General Short has been put in command for one reason only—to close this place down. It may take years, but it's going to be done, I warn you. The important job now is to get those people out of there, not keep them in."

FRANCIS stared bleakly at Chalmers. "Do you really believe that?"

"Frankly, Roger, yes. This project should never have been launched. You can't manipulate people the way we're doing—the endless hypno-drills, the forced pairing of children—look at yourself, five minutes ago you were seriously thinking of marrying two teen-age children just to stop them using their minds. The whole thing degrades human dignity, all the taboos, the increasing degree of introspection—sometimes Peters and Granger don't speak to anyone for two or three weeks—the way life in the dome has become tenable only by accepting the insane situation as the normal one. I think the reaction against the project is healthy."

Francis stared out at the dome. A gang of men were loading the so-called 'compressed food' (actually frozen foods with the brand names removed) into the commissary hatchway. Next morning, when Baker and his wife dialled the pre-arranged menu, the supplies would be promptly delivered, apparently

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from the space-hold. To some people, Francis knew, the project might well seem a complete fraud.

Quietly he said: "The people who volunteered accepted the sacrifice, and all it involved. How's Short going to get them out? Just open the door and whistle?"

Chalmers smiled, a little wearily. "He's not a fool, Roger. He's as sincerely concerned about their welfare as you are. Half the crew, particularly the older ones, would go mad within five minutes. But don't be disappointed, the project has more than proved its worth."

"It won't do that until they 'land'. If the project ends it will be we who have failed, not them. We can't rationalize by saying it's cruel or unpleasant. We owe it to the 14 people in the dome to keep it going."

Chalmers watched him shrewdly. "14? You mean 13, don't you, Doctor? Or are you inside the dome too?"

THE ship had stopped rotating. Sitting at his desk in Command, planning the next day's fire drills, Abel noticed the sudden absence of movement. All morning, as he walked around the ship—he no longer used the term Station—he had been aware of an inward drag that pulled him towards the wall, as if one leg were shorter than the other.

When he mentioned this to his father the older man merely said: "Captain Peters is in charge of Control. Always let him worry where the navigation of the ship is concerned."

This sort of advice now meant nothing to Abel. In the previous two months his mind had attacked everything around him voraciously, probing and analyzing, examining every facet of life in the Station. An enormous, once suppressed vocabulary of abstract terms and relationships lay latent below the surface of his mind, and nothing would stop him applying it.

Over their meal trays in the commissary he grilled Matthew Peters about the ship's flight path, the great parabola which would carry it to Alpha Centauri.

"What about the currents built into the ship?" he asked. "The rotation was designed to eliminate the magnetic poles set up when the ship was originally constructed. How are you compensating for that?"

Matthew looked puzzled. "I'm not sure, exactly. Probably the instruments are automatically compensated." When Abel smiled skeptically he shrugged. "Anyway, Father knows all about it. There's no doubt we're right on course."

"We hope," Abel murmured sotto voce. The more Abel asked Matthew about the navigational devices he and his father oper-

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ated in Control the more obvious it became that they were merely carrying out low-level instrument checks, and that their role was limited to replacing burnt-out pilot lights. Most of the instruments operated automatically, and they might as well have been staring at cabinets full of mattress floc.

What a joke if they were!

Smiling to himself, Abel realized that he had probably stated no more than the truth. It would be unlikely for the navigation to be entrusted to the crew when the slightest human error could throw the space ship irretrievably out of control, send it hurtling into a passing star. The designers of the ship would have sealed the automatic pilots well out of reach, given the crew light supervisory duties that created an illusion of control.

THAT was the real clue to life aboard the ship. None of their roles could be taken at face value. The day-to-day, minute-to minute programming carried out by himself and his father were merely a set of variations on a pattern already laid down; the permutations possible were endless, but the fact that he could send Matthew Peters to the commissary at 12 o'clock rather than 12:30 didn't give him any real power over Matthew's life. The master programs printed by the computers selected the day's menus, safety drills and recreation periods, and a list of names to choose from, but the slight leeway allowed, the extra two or three names supplied, were there in case of illness, not to give Abel any true freedom of choice.

One day, Abel promised himself, he would program himself out of the conditioning sessions. Shrewdly he guessed that the conditioning still blocked out a great deal of interesting material, that half his mind remained submerged. Something about the ship suggested that there might be more to it than—

"Hello, Abel, you look far away." Dr. Francis sat down next to him. "What's worrying you?"

"I was just calculating something," Abel explained quickly. "Tell me, assuming that each member of the crew consumes about three pounds of non-circulated food each day, roughly half a ton per year, the total cargo must be about 800 tons, and that's not allowing for any supplies after planet-fall. There should be at least 1500 tons aboard. Quite a weight."

"Not in absolute terms, Abel. The Station is only a small fraction of the ship. The main reactors, fuel tanks and space holds together weigh over 30,000 tons. They provide the gravitational pull that holds you to the floor."

Abel shook his head slowly.

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"Hardly, Doctor, the attraction must come from the stellar gravitational fields, or the weight of the ship would have to be about 6 x 10^{20} tons."

Dr. Francis watched Abel reflectively, aware that the young man had led him into a simple trap. The figure he had quoted was near enough the Earth's mass. "These are complex problems, Abel. I wouldn't worry too much about stellar mechanics. Captain Peters has that responsibility."

"I'm not trying to usurp it," Abel assured him. "Merely to extend my own knowledge. Don't you think it might be worth departing from the rules a little? For example, it would be interesting to test the effects of continued isolation. We could select a small group, subject them to artificial stimuli, even seal them off from the rest of the crew and condition them to believe they were back on Earth. It could be a really valuable experiment, doctor."

AS he waited in the conference room for General Short to finish his opening harangue, Francis repeated the last sentence to himself, wondering idly what Abel, with his limitless enthusiasm, would have made of the circle of defeated faces around the table.

". . . regret as much as you do, gentlemen, the need to discontinue the project. However, now that a decision has been made by the Space Department, it is our duty to implement it. Of course, the task won't be an easy one. What we need is a phased withdrawal, a gradual readjustment of the world around the crew that will bring them down to Earth as gently as a parachute." The General was a brisk, sharp-faced man in his fifties, with burly shoulders but sensitive eyes. He turned to Dr. Kersh, who was responsible for the dietary and biometric controls aboard the dome. "From what you tell me, Doctor, we might not have as much time as we'd like. This boy Abel sounds something of a problem."

Kersh smiled. "I was looking in at the commissary, overheard him tell Dr. Francis that he wanted to run an experiment on a small group of the crew. An isolation drill, would you believe it. He's estimated that the two-man tractor crews may be isolated for up to two years when the first foraging trips are made."

Captain Sanger, the engineering officer, added: "He's also trying to duck his conditioning sessions. He's wearing a couple of foam pads under his earphones, missing about 90% of the subsonics. We spotted it when the EEG tape we record showed no alpha waves. At first we thought

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it was a break in the cable, but when we checked visually on the screen we saw that he had his eyes open. He wasn't listening."

Francis drummed on the table. "It wouldn't have mattered. The sub-sonic was a maths instruction sequence—the four-figure antilog system."

"A good thing he did miss them," Kersh said with a laugh. "Sooner or later he'll work out that the dome is travelling in an elliptical orbit 93 million miles from a dwarf star of the G_o spectral class."

"What are you doing about this attempt to evade conditioning, Dr. Francis?" Short asked. When Francis shrugged vaguely he added: "I think we ought to regard the matter fairly seriously. From now on we'll be relying on the programming."

FLATLY, Francis said: "Abel will resume the conditioning. There's no need to do anything. Without the regular daily contact he'll soon feel lost. The sub-sonic voice is composed of his mother's vocal tones, when he no longer hears it he'll lose his orientations, feel completely deserted."

Short nodded slowly. "Well, let's hope so." He addressed Dr. Kersh. "At a rough estimate, Doctor, how long will it take to bring them back? Bearing in mind they'll have to be given complete freedom and that every TV and newspaper network in the world will interview each one a hundred times."

Kersh chose his words carefully. "Obviously a matter of years, General. All the conditioning drills will have to be gradually re-scored, as a stop-gap measure we may need to introduce a meteor collision . . . guessing, I'd say three to five years. Possibly longer."

"Fair enough. What would you estimate, Dr. Francis?"

Francis fiddled with his blotter, trying to view the question seriously. "I've no idea. *Bring them back.* What do you really mean, General? Bring what back?" Irritated, he snapped: "A hundred years."

Laughter crossed the table, and Short smiled at him, not unamiably. "That's fifty years more than the original project, Doctor. You can't have been doing a very good job here."

Francis shook his head. "You're wrong, General. The original project was to get them to Alpha Centauri. Nothing was said about bringing them *back.*" When the laughter fell away Francis cursed himself for his foolishness; antagonizing the General wouldn't help the people in the dome.

But Short seemed unruffled. "All right, then, it's obviously going to take some time." Point-

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edly, with a glance at Francis, he added: "It's the men and women in the ship we're thinking of, not ourselves, if we need a hundred years we'll take them, not one less. You may be interested to hear that the Space Department chiefs feel about fifteen years will be necessary. At least." There was a quickening of interest around the table. Francis watched Short with surprise. In fifteen years a lot could happen, there might be another spaceward swing of public opinion.

THE Department recommends that the project continue as before, with whatever budgetary parings we can make—stopping the dome is just a start—and that we condition the crew to believe that a round trip is in progress, that their mission is merely one of reconnaissance, and that they are bringing vital information back to Earth. When they step out of the space-ship they'll be treated as heroes and accept the strangeness of the world around them." Short looked across the table, waiting for someone to reply. Kersh stared doubtfully at his hands, and Sanger and Chalmers played mechanically with their blotters.

Just before Short continued Francis pulled himself together, realizing that he was faced with his last opportunity to save the project. However much they disagreed with Short, none of the others would try to argue with him.

"I'm afraid that won't do, General," he said, "though I appreciate the Department's foresight and your own sympathetic approach. The scheme you've outlined sounds plausible, but it just won't work." He sat forward, his voice controlled and precise. "General, ever since they were children these people have been trained to accept that they were a closed group, and would never have contact with anyone else. On the unconscious level, on the level of their functional nervous systems, no one else in the world exists, for them the neuronic basis of reality is isolation. You'll never train them to invert their whole universe, any more than you can train a fish to fly. If you start to tamper with the fundamental patterns of their psyches you'll produce the sort of complete mental block you see when you try to teach a left-handed person to use his right."

Francis glanced at Dr. Kersh, who was nodding in agreement. "Believe me, General, contrary to what you and the Space Department naturally assume, the people in the dome do *not* want to come out. Given the choice they would prefer to stay there, just as the gold-fish prefers to stay in its bowl."

Short paused before replying,

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evidently re-assessing Francis. "You may be right, Doctor," he admitted. "But where does that get us? We've got 15 years, perhaps 25 at the outside."

"There's only one way to do it," Francis told him. "Let the project continue, exactly as before, but with one difference. Prevent them from marrying and having children. In 25 years only the present younger generation will still be alive, and a further five years from then they'll all be dead. A life span in the dome is little more than 45 years. At the age of 30 Abel will probably be an old man. When they start to die off no one will care about them any longer."

THERE was a full half minute's silence, and then Kersh said: "It's the best suggestion, General. Humane, and yet faithful both to the original project and the Department's instructions. The absence of children would be only a slight deviation from the conditioned pathway. The basic isolation of the group would be strengthened, rather than diminished, also their realization that they themselves will never see planetfall. If we drop the pedagogical drills and play down the space flight they will soon become a small closed community, little different from any other out-group on the road to extinction."

Chalmers cut in: "Another point, General. It would be far easier—and cheaper—to stage, and as the members died off we could progressively close down the ship until finally there might be only a single deck left, perhaps even a few cabins."

Short stood up and paced over to the window, looking out through the clear glass over the frosted panes at the great dome in the hangar.

"It sounds a dreadful prospect," he commented. "Completely insane. As you say, though, it may be the only way out."

MOVING quietly among the trucks parked in the darkened hangar, Francis paused for a moment to look back at the lighted windows of the control deck. Two or three of the night staff sat watch over the line of TV screens, half asleep themselves as they observed the sleeping occupants of the dome.

He ducked out of the shadows and ran across to the dome, climbed the stairway to the entrance point thirty feet above. Opening the external lock, he crawled in and closed it behind him, then unfastened the internal entry hatch and pulled himself out of the sleeping cylinder into the silent cabin.

A single dim light glowed over the TV monitor screen as it revealed the three orderlies in the

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control deck, lounging back in a haze of cigarette smoke six feet from the camera.

Francis turned up the speaker volume, then tapped the mouthpiece sharply with his knuckle.

Tunic unbuttoned, sleep still shadowing his eyes, Colonel Chalmers leaned forward intently into the screen, the orderlies at his shoulder.

"Believe me, Roger, you're proving nothing. General Short and the Space Department won't withdraw their decision now that a special bill of enactment has been passed." When Francis still looked skeptical he added: "If anything, you're more likely to jeopardize them."

"I'll take a chance," Francis said. "Too many guarantees have been broken in the past. Here I'll be able to keep an eye on things." He tried to sound cool and unemotional; the cine-cameras would be recording the scene and it was important to establish the right impression. General Short would be only too keen to avoid a scandal. If he decided Francis was unlikely to sabotage the project he would probably leave him in the dome.

Chalmers pulled up a chair, his face earnest. "Roger, give yourself time to reconsider everything. You may be more of a discordant element than you realize. Remember, nothing would be easier than getting you out—a child could cut his way through the rusty hull with a blunt can-opener."

"Don't try it," Francis warned him quietly. "I'll be moving down to C-Deck, so if you come in after me they'll all know. Believe me, I won't try to interfere with the withdrawal programs. And I won't arrange any teen-age marriages. But I think the people inside may need me now for more than eight hours a day."

"Francis!" Chalmers shouted. "Once you go down there you'll never come out! Don't you realize you're entombing yourself in a situation that's totally unreal? You're deliberately withdrawing into a nightmare, sending yourself off on a non-stop journey to *nowhere!*"

Curtly, before he switched the set off for the last time, Francis replied: "Not nowhere, Colonel—Alpha Centauri."

SITTING down thankfully in the narrow bunk in his cabin, Francis rested briefly before setting off for the commissary. All day he had been busy coding the computer punch tapes for Abel, and his eyes ached with the strain of manually stamping each one of the thousands of minuscule holes. For eight hours he had sat without a break in the small isolation cell, electrodes clamped to his chest, knees and elbows while Abel measured his

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cardiac and respiratory rhythms.

The tests bore no relation to the daily programs Abel now worked out for his father, and Francis was finding it difficult to maintain his patience. Initially Abel had tested his ability to follow a prescribed set of instructions, producing an endless exponential function, then a digital representation of *pi* to a thousand places. Finally Abel had persuaded Francis to cooperate in a more difficult test—the task of producing a totally random sequence. Whenever he unconsciously repeated a simple progression, as he did if he was tired or bored, or a fragment of a larger possible progression, the computer scanning his progress sounded an alarm on the desk and he would have to start afresh. After a few hours the buzzer rasped out every ten seconds, snapping at him like a bad-tempered insect. Francis had finally hobbled over to the door that afternoon, entangling himself in the electrode leads, found to his annoyance that the door was locked (ostensibly to prevent any interruption by a fire patrol), then saw through the small porthole that the computer in the cubicle outside was running unattended.

But when Francis' pounding roused Abel from the far end of the next laboratory he had been almost irritable with the doctor for wanting to discontinue the experiment.

"DAMN it, Abel, I've been punching away at these things for three weeks now." He winced as Abel disconnected him, brusquely tearing off the adhesive tape. "Trying to produce random sequences isn't all that easy—my sense of reality is beginning to fog." (Sometimes he wondered if Abel was secretly waiting for this.) "I think I'm entitled to a vote of thanks."

"But we arranged for the trial to last three days, Doctor," Abel pointed out. "It's only later that the valuable results begin to appear. It's the errors you make that are interesting. The whole experiment is pointless now."

"Well, it's probably pointless anyway. Some mathematicians used to maintain that a random sequence was impossible to define."

"But we can assume that it *is* possible," Abel insisted. "I was just giving you some practice before we started on the trans-finite numbers."

Francis baulked here. "I'm sorry, Abel. Maybe I'm not so fit as I used to be. Anyway, I've got other duties to attend to."

"But they don't take long, Doctor. There's really nothing for you to do now."

He was right, as Francis was forced to admit. In the year he

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had spent in the dome Abel had remarkably streamlined the daily routines, provided himself and Francis with an excess of leisure time, particularly as the latter never went to conditioning (Francis was frightened of the sub-sonic voices—Chalmers and Short would be subtle in their attempts to extricate him, perhaps too subtle).

Life aboard the dome had been more of a drain on him than he anticipated. Chained to the routines of the ship, limited in his recreations and with few intellectual pastimes—there were no books aboard the ship—he found it increasingly difficult to sustain his former good humor, was beginning to sink into the deadening lethargy that had overcome most of the other crew members. Matthias Granger had retreated to his cabin, content to leave the programming to Abel, spent his time playing with a damaged clock, while the two Peters rarely strayed from Control. The three wives were almost completely inert, satisfied to knit and murmur to each other. The days passed indistinguishably. Sometimes, Francis told himself wryly, he nearly *did* believe that they were en route for Alpha Centauri. That would have been a joke for General Short!

AT 6:30, when he went to the commissary for his evening meal, he found that he was a quarter of an hour late.

"Your meal time was changed this afternoon," Baker told him, lowering the hatchway. "I got nothing ready for you."

Francis began to remonstrate but the man was adamant. "I can't make a special dip into space-hold just because you didn't look at Routine Orders, can I, Doctor?"

On the way out Francis met Abel, tried to persuade him to countermand the order. "You could have warned me, Abel. Damnation, I've been sitting inside your test rig all afternoon."

"But you went back to your cabin, Doctor," Abel pointed out smoothly. "You pass three SRO bulletins on your way from the laboratory. Always look at them at every opportunity, remember. Last-minute changes are liable at any time. I'm afraid you'll have to wait until 10:30 now."

Francis went back to his cabin, suspecting that the sudden change had been Abel's revenge on him for discontinuing the test. He would have to be more conciliatory with Abel, or the young man could make his life a hell, literally starve him to death. Escape from the dome was impossible now—there was a mandatory 20-year sentence on anyone making an unauthorized entry into the space simulator.

After resting for an hour or

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so, he left his cabin at 8 o'clock to carry out his duty checks of the pressure seals by the B-Deck Meteor Screen. He always went through the pretense of reading them, enjoying the sense of participation in the space flight which the exercise gave him, deliberately accepting the illusion.

The seals were mounted in the control points at ten-yard intervals along the perimeter corridor, a narrow circular passageway around the main corridor. Alone there, the servos clicking and snapping, he felt at peace within the space vehicle. "Earth itself is in orbit around the Sun," he mused as he checked the seals, "and the whole solar system is travelling at 40 miles a second towards the constellation Lyra. The degree of illusion that exists is a complex question."

Something cut through his reverie.

The pressure indicator was flickering slightly. The needle wavered between 0.001 and 0.0015 psi. The pressure inside the dome was fractionally above atmospheric, in order that dust might be expelled through untoward cracks (though the main object of the pressure seals was to get the crew safely into the vacuum-proof emergency cylinders in case the dome was damaged and required internal repairs).

For a moment Francis panicked, wondering whether Short had decided to come in after him —the reading, although meaningless, indicated that a breach had opened in the hull. Then the hand moved back to zero, and footsteps sounded along the radial corridor at right angles past the next bulkhead.

Quickly Francis stepped into its shadow. Before his death old Peters had spent a lot of time mysteriously pottering around the corridor, probably secreting a private food cache behind one of the rusting panels.

He leaned forward as the footsteps crossed the corridor.

Abel?

HE watched the young man disappear down a stairway, then made his way into the radial corridor, searching the steel-grey sheeting for a retractable panel. Immediately adjacent to the end wall of the corridor, against the outer skin of the dome, was a small fire control booth.

A tuft of slate-white hairs lay on the floor of the booth.

Asbestos fibres!

Francis stepped into the booth, within a few seconds located a loosened panel that had rusted off its rivets. About ten inches by six, it slid back easily. Beyond it was the outer wall of the dome, a hand's breadth away. Here too was a loose plate, held in position by a crudely fashioned hook.

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Francis hesitated, then lifted the hook and drew back the panel.

He was looking straight down into the hangar!

Below, a line of trucks was disgorging supplies onto the concrete floor under a couple of spotlights, a sergeant shouting orders at the labor squad. To the right was the control deck, Chalmers in his office on the evening shift.

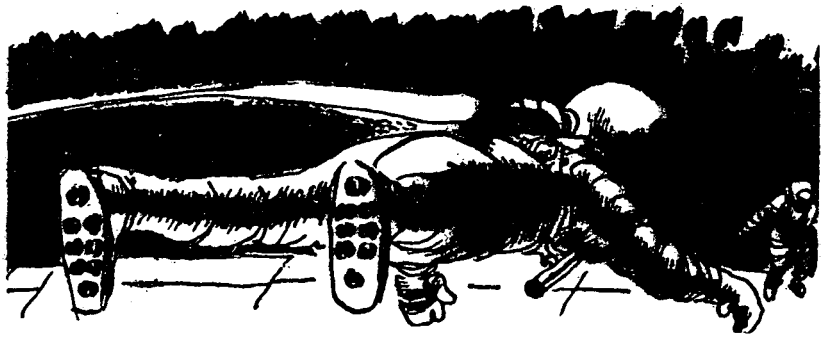
The spy-hole was directly below the stairway, and the overhanging metal steps shielded it from the men in the hangar. The asbestos had been carefully frayed so that it concealed the retractable plate. The wire hook was as badly rusted as the rest of the hull, and Francis estimated that the window had been in use for over 30 or 40 years.

So almost certainly old Peters had regularly looked out through the window, and knew perfectly well that the space ship was a myth. Nonetheless he had stayed aboard, perhaps realizing that the truth would destroy the others, or preferred to be captain of an artificial ship rather than a self-exposed curiosity in the world outside.

Presumably he had passed on the secret. Not to his bleak taciturn son, but to the one other lively mind, one who would keep the secret and make the most of it. For his own reasons he too had decided to stay in the dome, realizing that he would soon be the effective captain, free to pursue his experiments in applied psychology. He might even have failed to grasp that Francis was not a true member of the crew. His confident mastery of the programming, his lapse of interest in Control, his casualness over the safety devices, all meant one thing—

Abel knew!

THE END



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REQUIEM

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Illustrated by SUMMERS

All during its lifetime Earth had been deluged . . . overwhelmed . . . submerged in an endless torrent of words. Was even its death to be stripped of dignity by the cackling of the mass media?

KELLON thought sourly that he wasn't commanding a star-ship, he was running a travelling circus. He had aboard telaudio men with tons of equipment, pontifical commentators who knew the answer to anything, beautiful females who were experts on the woman's angle, pompous bureaucrats after publicity, and entertainment stars who had come along for the same reason.

He had had a good ship and crew, one of the best in the Survey. *Had* had. They weren't any more. They had been taken off their proper job of pushing astrographical knowledge ever further into the remote regions of the galaxy, and had been sent off with this cargo of costly people on a totally unnecessary mission.

He said bitterly to himself, "Damn all sentimentalists."

He said aloud, "Does its position check with your calculated orbit, Mr. Riney?"

Riney, the Second, a young and serious man who had been fussing with instruments in the astrogation room, came out and said,

"Yes. Right on the nose. Shall we go in and land now?"

Kellon didn't answer for a moment, standing there in the front of the bridge, a middle-aged man, stocky, square-shouldered, and with his tanned, plain face showing none of the resentment he felt. He hated to give the order but he had to.

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"All right, take her in."

He looked gloomily through the filter-windows as they went in. In this fringe-spiral of the galaxy, stars were relatively infrequent, and there were only ragged drifts of them across the darkness. Full ahead shone a small, compact sun like a diamond. It was a white dwarf and had been so for two thousand years, giving forth so little warmth that the planets which circled it had been frozen and ice-locked all that time. They still were, all except the innermost world.

KELLON stared at that planet, a tawny blob. The ice that had sheathed it ever since its primary collapsed into a white dwarf, had now melted. Months before, a dark wandering body had passed very close to this lifeless system. Its passing had perturbed the planetary orbits and the inner planets had started to spiral slowly in toward their sun, and the ice had begun to go.

Viresson, one of the junior officers, came into the bridge looking harassed. He said to Kellon,

"They want to see you down below, sir. Especially Mr. Borrodale. He says it's urgent."

Kellon thought wearily, "Well, I might as well go down and face the pack of them. Here's where they really begin."

He nodded to Viresson, and went down below to the main cabin. The sight of it revolted him. Instead of his own men in it, relaxing or chinning, it held a small and noisy mob of overdressed, overloud men and women, all of whom seemed to be talking at once and uttering brittle, nervous laughter.

"Captain Kellon, I want to ask you—"

"Captain, if you *please*—"

He patiently nodded and smiled and plowed through them to Borrodale. He had been given particular instructions to cooperate with Borrodale, the most famous telaudio commentator in the Federation.

Borrodale was a slightly plump man with a round pink face and incongruously large and solemn black eyes. When he spoke, one recognized at once that deep, incredibly rich and meaningful voice.

"My first broadcast is set for thirty minutes from now, Captain. I shall want a view as we go in. If my men could take a mobile up to the bridge—"

Kellon nodded. "Of course. Mr. Viresson is up there and will assist them in any way."

"Thank you, Captain. Would you like to see the broadcast?"

"I would, yes, but—"

He was interrupted by Lorri Lee, whose glitteringly handsome face and figure and sophisticated drawl made her the idol

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of all female telaudio reporters.

"*My* broadcast is to be right after landing—remember? I'd like to do it alone, with just the emptiness of that world as background. Can you keep the others from spoiling the effect? Please?"

"We'll do what we can," Kellon mumbled. And as the rest of the pack converged on him he added hastily, "I'll talk to you later. Mr. Borrodale's broadcast—"

HE GOT through them, following after Borrodale toward the cabin that had been set up as a telaudio-transmitter room. It had, Kellon thought bitterly, once served an honest purpose, holding the racks of soil and water and other samples from far worlds. But that had been when they were doing an honest Survey job, not chaperoning chattering fools on this sentimental pilgrimage.

The broadcasting set-up was beyond Kellon. He didn't want to hear this but it was better than the mob in the main cabin. He watched as Borrodale made a signal. The monitor-screen came alive.

It showed a dun-colored globe spinning in space, growing visibly larger as they swept toward it. Now straggling seas were identifiable upon it. Moments passed and Borrodale did not speak, just letting that picture go out. Then his deep voice spoke over the picture, with dramatic simplicity.

"You are looking at the Earth, he said.

Silence again, and the spinning brownish ball was bigger now, with white clouds ragged upon it. And then Borrodale spoke again.

"You who watch from many worlds in the galaxy—this is the homeland of our race. Speak its name to yourselves. The Earth."

Kellon felt a deepening distaste. This was all true, but still it was phony. What was Earth now to him, or to Borrodale, or his billions of listeners? But it was a story, a sentimental occasion, so they had to pump it up into something big.

"Some thirty-five hundred years ago," Borrodale was saying, "our ancestors lived on this world alone. That was when they first went into space. To these other planets first—but very soon, to other stars. And so our Federation began, our community of human civilization on many stars and worlds."

Now, in the monitor, the view of Earth's dun globe had been replaced by the face of Borrodale in close-up. He paused dramatically.

"Then, over two thousand years ago, it was discovered that the sun of Earth was about to collapse into a white dwarf. So

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those people who still remained on Earth left it forever and when the solar change came, it and the other planets became mantled in eternal ice. And now, within months, the final end of the old planet of our origin is at hand. It is slowly spiralling toward the sun and soon it will plunge into it as Mercury and Venus have already done. And when that occurs, the world of man's origin will be gone forever."

Again the pause, for just the right length of time, and then Borrodale continued in a voice expertly pitched in a lower key.

"We on this ship—we humble reporters and servants of the vast telaudio audience on all the worlds—have come here so that in these next weeks we can give you this last look at our ancestral world. We think—we hope—that you'll find interest in recalling a past that is almost legend."

And Kellon thought, "The bastard has no more interest in this old planet than I have, but he surely is smooth."

AS SOON as the broadcast ended, Kellon found himself besieged once more by the clamoring crowd in the main cabin. He held up his hand in protest.

"Please, now now—we have a landing to make first. Will you come with me, Doctor Darnow?"

Darnow was from Historical Bureau, and was the titular head of the whole expedition, although no one paid him much attention. He was a sparrowy, elderly man who babbled excitedly as he went with Kellon to the bridge.

He at least, was sincere in his interest, Kellon thought. For that matter, so were all the dozen-odd scientists who were aboard. But they were far outnumbered by the fat cats and big brass out for publicity, the professional enthusers and sentimentalist. A real hell of a job the Survey had given him!

In the bridge, he glanced through the window at the dun-colored planet and its satellite. Then he asked Darnow, "You said something about a particular place where you wanted to land?"

The historiographer bobbed his head, and began unfolding a big, old-fashioned chart.

"See this continent here? Along its eastern coast were a lot of the biggest cities, like New York."

Kellon remembered that name, he'd learned it in school history, a long time ago.

Darnow's finger stabbed the chart. "If you could land there, right on the island—"

Kellon studied the relief features, then shook his head. "Too low. There'll be great tides as time goes on and we can't take chances. That higher ground back inland a bit should be all right, though."

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Darnow looked disappointed. "Well. I suppose you're right."

Kellon told Riney to set up the landing-pattern. Then he asked Darnow skeptically,

"You surely don't expect to find much in those old cities now —not after they've had all that ice on them for two thousand years?"

"They'll be badly damaged, of course," Darnow admitted. "But there should be a vast number of relics. I could study here for years—"

"We haven't got years, we've got only a few months before this planets gets too close to the Sun," said Kellon. And he added mentally, "Thank God."

THE ship went into its landing-pattern. Atmosphere whined outside its hull and then thick gray clouds boiled and raced around it. It went down through the cloud layer and moved above a dull brown landscape that had flecks of white in its deeper valleys. Far ahead there was the glint of a gray ocean. But the ship came down toward a rolling brown plain and settled there, and then there was the expected thunderclap of silence that always followed the shutting off of all machinery.

Kellon looked at Riney, who turned in a moment from the test-panel with a slight surprise on his face. "Pressure, oxygen, humidity, everything—all optimum." And then he said, "But of course. This place *was* optimum."

Kellon nodded. He said, "Doctor Darnow and I will have a look out first. Viresson, you keep our passengers in."

When he and Darnow went to the lower airlock he heard a buzzing clamor from the main cabin and he judged that Viresson was having his hands full. The people in there were not used to being said no to, and he could imagine their resentment.

Cold, damp air struck a chill in Kellon when they stepped down out of the airlock. They stood on muddy, gravelly ground that squashed a little under their boots as they trudged away from the ship. They stopped and looked around, shivering.

Under the low gray cloudy sky there stretched a sad, sunless brown landscape. Nothing broke the drab color of raw soil, except the shards of ice still lingering in low places. A heavy desultory wind stirred the raw air, and then was still. There was not a sound except the clinkclinking of the ship's skin cooling and contracting, behind them. Kellon thought that no amount of sentimentality could make this anything but a dreary world.

But Darnow's eyes were shining. "We'll have to make every minute of the time count," he muttered. "Every minute."

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Within two hours, the heavy broadcast equipment was being trundled away from the ship on two motor-tracs that headed eastward. On one of the tracs rode Lorri Lee, resplendent in lilac-colored costume of synthesilk.

Kellon, worried about the possibility of quicksands, went along for that first broadcast from the cliffs that looked down on the ruins of New York. He wished he hadn't, when it got under way.

For Lorri Lee, her blonde head bright even in the dull light, turned loose all her practised charming gestures for the broadcast cameras, as she gestured with pretty excitement down toward the ruins.

"It's so *unbelievable!*" she cried to a thousand worlds. "To be here on Earth, to see the old places again—it *does* something to you!"

It did something to Kellon. It made him feel sick at his stomach. He turned and went back to the ship, feeling at that moment that if Lorri Lee went into a quicksand on the way back, it would be no great loss.

BUT that first day was only the beginning. The big ship quickly became the center of multifarious and continuous broadcasts. It had been especially equipped to beam strongly to the nearest station in the Federation network, and its transmitters were seldom quiet.

Kellon found that Darnow, who was supposed to coordinate all this programming, was completely useless. The little historian was living in a seventh heaven on this old planet which had been uncovered to view for the first time in milennia, and he was away most of the time on field trips of his own. It fell to his assistant, an earnest and worried and harassed young man, to try to reconcile the clashing claims and demands of the highly temperamental broadcasting stars.

Kellon felt an increasing boredom at having to stand around while all this tosh went out over the ether. These people were having a field-day but he didn't think much of them and of their broadcasts. Roy Quayle, the young male fashion designer, put on a semi-humorous, semi-nostalgic display of the old Earth fashions, with the prettier girls wearing some of the ridiculous old costumes he had had duplicated. Barden, the famous teleplay producer, ran off ancient films of the old Earth dramas that had everyone in stitches. Jay Maxson, a rising politician in Federation Congress, discussed with Borrodale the governmental systems of the old days, in a way calculated to give his own Wide-Galaxy Party none the worst of it.

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The Arcturus Players, that brilliant group of young stage-folk, did readings of old Earth dramas and poems.

It was, Kellon thought disgustedly, just playing. Grown people, famous people, seizing the opportunity given by the accidental end of a forgotten planet to posture in the spotlight like smart-aleck children. There was real work to do in the galaxy, the work of the Survey, the endless and wearying but always-fascinating job of charting the wild systems and worlds. And instead of doing that job, he was condemned to spend weeks and months here with these phonies.

The scientists and historians he respected. They did few broadcasts and they did not fake their interest. It was one of them, Haller, the biologist, who excitedly showed Kellon a handful of damp soil a week after their arrival.

"LOOK at *that!*" he said proudly.

Kellon stared. "What?"

"Those seeds—they're common weed-grass seeds. Look at them."

Kellon looked, and now he saw that from each of the tiny seeds projected a new-looking hairlike tendril.

"They're sprouting?" he said unbelievingly.

Haller nodded happily. "I was hoping for it. You see, it was almost spring in the northern hemisphere, according to the records, when Sol collapsed suddenly into a white dwarf. Within hours the temperature plunged and the hydrosphere and atmosphere began to freeze."

"But surely that would kill all plant-life?"

"No," said Haller. "The larger plants, trees, perennial shrubs, and so on, yes. But the seeds of the smaller annuals just froze into suspended animation. Now the warmth that melted them is causing germination."

"Then we'll have grass—small plants?"

"Very soon, the way the warmth is increasing."

It was, indeed, getting a little warmer all the time as these first weeks went by. The clouds lifted one day and there was brilliant, thin white sunshine from the little diamond sun. And there came a morning when they found the rolling landscape flushed with a pale tint of green.

Grass grew. Weeds grew, vines grew, all of them seeming to rush their growth as though they knew that this, their last season, would not be long. Soon the raw brown mud of the hills and valleys had been replaced by a green carpet, and everywhere taller growths were shooting up, and flowers beginning to appear. Hepaticas, bluebells, dandelions, violets, bloomed once more.

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Kellon took a long walk, now that he did not have to plow through mud. The chattering people around the ship, the constant tug and pull of clashing temperaments, the brittle, febrile voices, got him down. He felt better to get away by himself.

The grass and the flowers had come back but otherwise this was still an empty world. Yet there was a certain peace of mind in tramping up and down the long green rolling slopes. The sun was bright and cheerful now, and white clouds dotted the sky, and the warm wind whispered as he sat upon a ridge and looked away westward where nobody was, or would ever be again.

"Damned dull," he thought. "But at least it's better than back with the gabblers."

He sat for a long time in the slanting sunshine, feeling his bristling nerves relax. The grass stirred about him, rippling in long waves, and the taller flowers nodded.

No other movement, no other life. A pity, he thought, that there were no birds for this last spring of the old planet—not even a butterfly. Well, it made no difference, all this wouldn't last long.

As Kellon tramped back through the deepening dusk, he suddenly became aware of a shining bubble in the darkening sky. He stopped and stared up at it and then remembered. Of course, it was the old planet's moon—during the cloudy nights he had forgotten all about it. He went on, with its vague light about him.

WHEN he stepped back into the lighted main cabin of the ship, he was abruptly jarred out of his relaxed mood. A first-class squabble was going on, and everybody was either contributing to it or commenting on it. Lorri Lee, looking like a pretty child complaining of a hurt, was maintaining that she should have broadcast time next day for her special woman's-interest feature, and somebody else disputed her claim, and young Vallely, Darnow's assistant, looked harried and upset. Kellon got by them without being noticed, locked the door of his cabin and poured himself a long drink, and damned Survey all over again for this assignment.

He took good care to get out of the ship early in the morning, before the storm of temperament blew up again. He left Viresson in charge of the ship, there being nothing for any of them to do now anyway, and legged it away over the green slopes before anyone could call him back.

They had five more weeks of this, Kellon thought. Then, thank God, Earth would be getting so near the Sun that they must take

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the ship back into its proper element of space. Until that wished-for day arrived, he would stay out of sight as much as possible.

He walked miles each day. He stayed carefully away from the east and the ruins of old New York, where the others so often were. But he went north and west and south, over the grassy, flowering slopes of the empty world. At least it was peaceful, even though there was nothing at all to see.

But after a while, Kellon found that there were things to see if you looked for them. There was the way the sky changed, never seeming to look the same twice. Sometimes it was deep blue and white clouds sailed it like mighty ships. And then it would suddenly turn gray and miserable, and rain would drizzle on him, to be ended when a lance of sunlight shot through the clouds and slashed them to flying ribbons. And there was a time when, upon a ridge, he watched vast thunderheads boil up and darken in the west and black storm marched across the land like an army with banners of lightning and drums of thunder.

The winds and the sunshine, the sweetness of the air and the look of the moonlight and the feel of the yielding grass under his feet, all seemed oddly right. Kellon had walked on many worlds under the glare of many-colored suns, and some of them he had liked much better than this one and some of them he had not liked at all, but never had he found a world that seemed so exactly attuned to his body as this outworn, empty planet.

He wondered vaguely what it had been like when there were trees and birds, and animals of many kinds, and roads and cities. He borrowed film-books from the reference library Darnow and the others had brought, and looked at them in his cabin of nights. He did not really care very much but at least it kept him out of the broils and quarrels, and it had a certain interest.

THEREAFTER in his wandering strolls, Kellon tried to see the place as it would have been in the long ago. There would have been robins and bluebirds, and yellow-and-black bumblebees nosing the flowers, and tall trees with names that were equally strange to him, elms and willows and sycamores. And small furred animals, and humming clouds of insects, and fish and frogs in the pools and streams, a whole vast complex symphony of life, long gone, long forgotten.

But were all the men and women and children who had lived here less forgotten? Borrodale and the others talked much on their broadcasts about the people of old Earth, but that was

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just a faceless name, a term that meant nothing. Not one of those millions, surely, had ever thought of himself as part of a numberless multitude. Each one had been to himself, and to those close to him or her, an individual, unique and never to be exactly repeated, and what did the glib talkers know of all those individuals, what could anyone know?

Kellon found traces of them here and there, bits of flotsam that even the crush of the ice had spared. A twisted piece of steel, a girder or rail that someone had labored to make. A quarry with the tool-marks still on the rocks, where surely men had once sweated in the sun. The broken shards of concrete that stretched away in a ragged line to make a road upon which men and women had once travelled, hurrying upon missions of love or ambition, greed or fear.

He found more than that, a startling find that he made by purest chance. He followed a brook that ran down a very narrow valley, and at one point he leaped across it and as he landed he looked up and saw that there was a house.

Kellon thought at first that it was miraculously preserved whole and unbroken, and surely that could not be. But when he went closer he saw that this was only illusion and that destruction had been at work upon it too. Still, it remained, incredibly, a recognizable house.

It was a rambling stone cottage with low walls and a slate roof, set close against the steep green wall of the valley. One gable-end was smashed in, and part of that end wall. Studying the way it was embayed in the wall, Kellon decided that a chance natural arch of ice must have preserved it from the grinding pressure that had shattered almost all other structures.

THE windows and doors were only gaping openings. He went inside and looked around the cold shadows of what had once been a room. There were some wrecked pieces of rotting furniture, and dried mud banked along one wall contained unrecognizable bits of rusted junk, but there was not much else. It was chill and oppressive in there, and he went out and sat on the little terrace in the sunshine.

He looked at the house. It could have been built no later than the Twentieth Century, he thought. A good many different people must have lived in it during the hundreds of years before the evacuation of Earth.

Kellon thought that it was strange that the airphoto surveys that Darnow's men had made in quest of relics had not discovered the place. But then it was not so strange, the stone walls

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were so grayly inconspicuous and it was set so deeply into the sheltering bay of the valley wall.

His eye fell on eroded lettering on the cement side of the terrace, and he went and brushed the soil off that place. The words were time-eaten and faint but he could read them.

"Ross and Jennie—Their House."

Kellon smiled. Well, at least he knew now who once had lived here, who probably had built the place. He could imagine two young people happily scratching the words in the wet cement, exuberant with achievement. And who had Ross and Jennie been, and where were they now?

He walked around the place. To his surprise, there was a ragged flower-garden at one side. A half-dozen kinds of brilliant little flowers, unlike the wild ones of the slopes, grew in patchy disorder here. Seeds of an old garden had been ready to germinate when the long winter of Earth came down, and had slept in suspended animation until the ice melted and the warm blooming time came at last. He did not know what kinds of flowers these were, but there was a brave jauntiness about them that he liked.

Starting back across the green land in the soft twilight, Kellon thought that he should tell Darnow about the place. But if he did, the gabbling pack in the ship would certainly stampede toward it. He could imagine the solemn and cute and precious broadcasts that Borrodale and the Lee woman and rest of them would stage from the old house.

"No," he thought. "The devil with them."

He didn't care anything himself about the old house, it was just that it was a refuge of quiet he had found and he didn't want to draw to it the noisy horde he was trying to escape.

KELLON was glad in the following days that he had not told. The house gave him a place to go to, to poke around and investigate, a focus for his interest in this waiting time. He spent hours there, and never told anyone at all.

Haller, the biologist, lent him a book on the flowers of Earth, and he brought it with him and used it to identify those in the ragged garden. Verbenas, pinks, morning glories, and the bold red and yellow ones called nasturtiums. Many of these, he read, did not do well on other worlds and had never been successfully transplanted. If that was so, this would be their last blooming anywhere at all.

He rooted around the interior of the house, trying to figure out how people had lived in it. It was

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strange, not at all like a modern metalloy house. Even the interior walls were thick beyond belief, and the windows seemed small and pokey. The biggest room was obviously where they had lived most, and its window-openings looked out on the little garden and the green valley and brook beyond.

Kellon wondered what they had been like, the Ross and Jennie who had once sat here together and looked out these windows. What things had been important to them? What had hurt them, what had made them laugh? He himself had never married, the far-ranging captains of the Survey seldom did. But he wondered about this marriage of long ago, and what had come of it. Had they had children, did their blood still run on the far worlds? But even if it did, what was that now to those two of long ago?

There had been a poem about flowers at the end of the old book on flowers Haller had lent him, and he remembered some of it.

"All are at one now, roses and lovers,
Not known of the winds and the fields and the sea,
Not a breath of the time that has been hovers
In the air now soft with a summer to be."

Well, yes, Kellon thought, they were all at one now, the Rosses and the Jennies and the things they had done and the things they had thought, all at one now in the dust of this old planet whose fiery final summer would be soon, very soon. Physically, everything that had been done, everyone who had lived, on Earth was still here in its atoms, excepting the tiny fraction of its matter that had sped to other worlds.

He thought of the names that were so famous still through all the galactic worlds, names of men and women and places. Shakespeare, Plato, Beethoven, Blake, the old splendor of Babylon and the bones of Angkor and the humble houses of his own ancestors, all here, all still here.

Kellon mentally shook himself. He didn't have enough to do, that was his trouble, to be brooding here on such shadowy things. He had seen all there was to this queer little old place, and there was no use in coming back to it.

BUT he came back. It was not, he told himself, as though he had any sentimental antiquarian interests in this old place. He had heard enough of that kind of gush from all the glittering phonies in the ship. He was a Survey man and all he wanted was to get back to his job, but while he was stuck here it was better to be roaming the green land or poking about this old

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relic than to have to listen to the endless babbling and quarrelling of those others.

They were quarrelling more and more, because they were tired of it here. It had seemed to them a fine thing to posture upon a galactic stage by helping to cover the end of Earth, but time dragged by and their flush of synthetic enthusiasm wore thin. They could not leave, the expedition must broadcast the final climax of the planet's end, but that was still weeks away. Darnow and his scholars and scientists, busy coming and going to many old sites, could have stayed here forever but the others were frankly bored.

But Kellon found in the old house enough interest to keep the waiting from being too oppressive. He had read a good bit now about the way things had been here in the old days, and he sat long hours on the little terrace in the afternoon sunshine, trying to imagine what it had been like when the man and woman named Ross and Jennie had lived here.

So strange, so circumscribed, that old life seemed now! Most people had had ground-cars in those days, he had read, and had gone back and forth in them to the cities where they worked. Did both the man and woman go, or just the man? Did the woman stay in the house, perhaps with their children if they had any, and in the afternoons did she do things in the little flower garden where a few bright, ragged survivors still bloomed? Did they ever dream that some future day when they were long gone, their house would lie empty and silent with no visitor except a stranger from far-off stars? He remembered a line in one of the old plays the Arcturus Players had read. Come like shadows, so depart.

No, Kellon thought. Ross and Jennie were shadows now but they had not been then. To them, and to all the other people he could visualize going and coming busily about the Earth in those days, it was he, the future, the man yet to come, who was the shadow. Alone here, sitting and trying to imagine the long ago, Kellon had an eery feeling sometimes that his vivid imaginings of people and crowded cities and movement and laughter were the reality and that he himself was only a watching wraith.

SUMMER days came swiftly, hot and hotter. Now the white sun was larger in the heavens and pouring down such light and heat as Earth had not received for millennia. And all the green life across it seemed to respond with an exultant surge of final growth, an act of joyous affirmation that Kellon found infinitely

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touching. Now even the nights were warm, and the winds blew thrilling soft, and on the distant beaches the ocean leaped up in a laughter of spray and thunder, running in great solar tides.

With a shock as though awakened from dreaming, Kellon suddenly realized that only a few days were left. The spiral was closing in fast now and very quickly the heat would mount beyond all tolerance.

He would, he told himself, be very glad to leave. There would be the wait in space until it was all over, and then he could go back to his own work, his own life, and stop fussing over shadows because there was nothing else to do.

Yes. He would be glad.

Then when only a few days were left, Kellon walked out again to the old house and was musing over it when a voice spoke behind him.

"Perfect," said Borrodale's voice. "A perfect relic."

Kellon turned, feeling somehow startled and dismayed. Borrodale's eyes were alight with interest as he surveyed the house, and then he turned to Kellon.

"I was walking when I saw you, Captain, and thought I'd catch up to you. Is this where you've been going so often?"

Kellon, a little guiltily, evaded. "I've been here a few times."

"But why in the world didn't you *tell* us about this?" exclaimed Borrodale. "Why, we can do a terrific final broadcast from here. A typical ancient home of Earth. Roy can put some of the Players in the old costumes, and we'll show them living here the way people did—"

Unexpectedly to himself, a violent reaction came up in Kellon. He said roughly,

"No."

Borrodale arched his eyebrows. "No? But why not?"

Why not, indeed? What difference could it possible make to him if they swarmed all over the old house, laughing at its ancientness and its inadequacies, posing grinning for the cameras in front of it, prancing about in old-fashioned costumes and making a show of it. What could that mean to him, who cared nothing about this forgotten planet or anything on it?

And yet something in him revolted at what they would do here, and he said,

"We might have to take off very suddenly, now. Having you all out here away from the ship could involve a dangerous delay."

"You said yourself we wouldn't take off for a few days yet!" exclaimed Borrodale. And he added firmly, "I don't know why you should want to obstruct us, Captain. But I can go over your head to higher authority."

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HE WENT away, and Kellon thought unhappily, He'll message back to Survey headquarters and I'll get my ears burned off, and why the devil did I do it anyway? I must be getting real planet-happy.

He went and sat down on the terrace, and watched until the sunset deepened into dusk. The moon came up white and brilliant, but the air was not quiet tonight. A hot, dry wind had begun to blow, and the stir of the tall grass made the slopes and plains seem vaguely alive. It was as though a queer pulse had come into the air and the ground, as the sun called its child homeward and Earth strained to answer. The house dreamed in the silver light, and the flowers in the garden rustled.

Borrodale came back, a dark pudgy figure in the moonlight. He said triumphantly,

"I got through to your headquarters. They've ordered your full cooperation. We'll want to make our first broadcast here tomorrow."

Kellon stood up. "No."

"You can't ignore an order—"

"We won't be here tomorrow," said Kellon. "It is my responsibility to get the ship off Earth in ample time for safety. We take off in the morning."

Borrodale was silent for a moment, and when he spoke his voice had a puzzled quality.

"You're advancing things just to block our broadcast, of course. I just can't understand your attitude."

Well, Kellon thought, he couldn't quite understand it himself, so how could he explain it? He remained silent, and Borrodale looked at him and then at the old house.

"Yet maybe I do understand," Borrodale said thoughtfully, after a moment. "You've come here often, by yourself. A man can get too friendly with ghosts—"

Kellon said roughly, "Don't talk nonsense. We'd better get back to the ship, there's plenty to do before take off."

Borrodale did not speak as they went back out of the moonlit valley. He looked back once, but Kellon did not look back.

THEY took the ship off twelve hours later, in a morning made dull and ominous by racing clouds. Kellon felt a sharp relief when they cleared atmosphere and were out in the depthless, starry blackness. He knew where he was, in space. It was the place where a spaceman belonged. He'd get a stiff reprimand for this later, but he was not sorry.

They put the ship into a calculated orbit, and waited. Days, many of them, must pass before the end came to Earth. It seemed quite near the white sun now, and its Moon had slid away from

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it on a new distorted orbit, but even so it would be a while before they could broadcast to a watching galaxy the end of its ancestral world.

Kellon stayed much of that time in his cabin. The gush that was going out over the broadcasts now, as the grand finale approached, made him sick. He wished the whole thing was over. It was, he told himself, getting to be a bore—

An hour and twenty minutes to E-time, and he supposed he must go up to the bridge and watch it. The mobile camera had been set up there and Borrodale and as many others of them as could crowd in were there. Borrodale had been given the last hour's broadcast, and it seemed that the others resented this.

"Why must you have the whole last hour?" Lorri Lee was saying bitterly to Borrodale. "It's not fair."

Quayle nodded angrily. "There'll be the biggest audience in history, and we should all have a chance to speak."

Borrodale answered them, and the voices rose and bickered, and Kellon saw the broadcast technicians looking worried. Beyond them through the filter-window he could see the dark dot of the planet closing on the white star. The sun called, and it seemed that with quickened eagerness Earth moved on the last steps of its long road. And the clamoring, bickering voices in his ears suddenly brought rage to Kellon.

"Listen," he said to the broadcast men. "Shut off all sound transmission. You can keep the picture on, but no sound."

That shocked them all into silence. The Lee woman finally protested, "Captain Kellon, you can't!"

"I'm in full command when in space, and I can, and do," he said.

"But the broadcast, the commentary—"

Kellon said wearily, "Oh, for Christ's sake all of you shut up, and let the planet die in peace."

HE TURNED his back on them. He did not hear their resentful voices, did not even hear when they fell silent and watched through the dark filter-windows as he was watching, as the camera and the galaxy was watching.

And what was there to see but a dark dot almost engulfed in the shining veils of the sun? He thought that already the stones of the old house must be beginning to vaporize. And now the veils of light and fire almost concealed the little planet, as the star gathered in its own.

All the atoms of old Earth, Kellon thought, in this moment bursting free to mingle with the solar being, all that had been

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Ross and Jennie, all that had been Shakespeare and Schubert, gay flowers and running streams, oceans and rocks and the wind of the air, received into the brightness that had given them life.

They watched in silence, but there was nothing more to see, nothing at all. Silently the camera was turned off.

Kellon gave an order, and presently the ship was pulling out of orbit, starting on the long voyage back. By that time the others had gone, all but Borrodale. He said to Borrodale, without turning,

"Now go ahead and send your complaint to headquarters."

Borrodale shook his head. "Silence can be the best requiem of all. There'll be no complaint. I'm glad now, Captain."

"Glad?"

"Yes," said Borrodale. "I'm glad that Earth had one true mourner, at the last."

THE END

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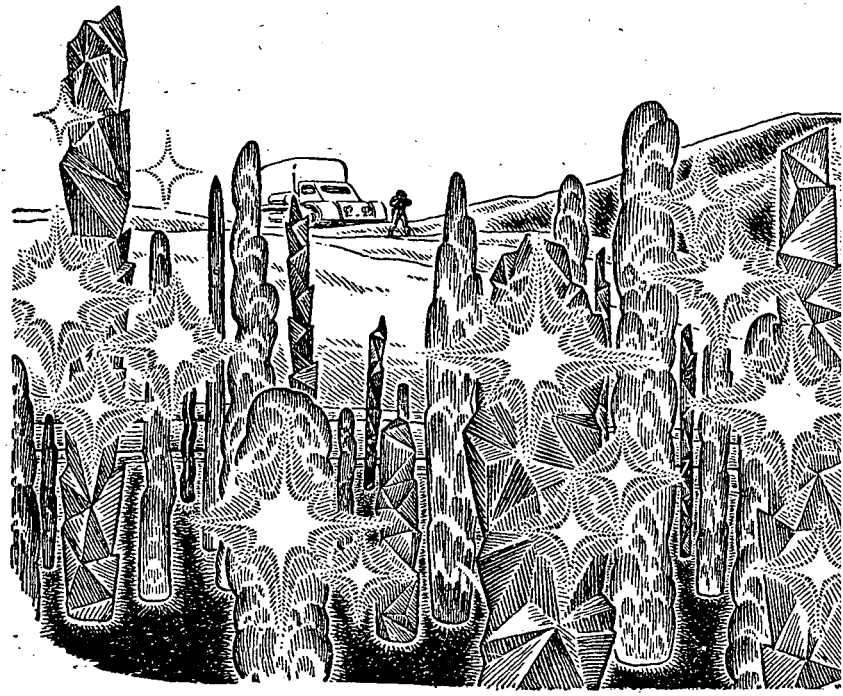
Few science fiction stories manage to combine astonishingly new ideas in other-worldly creatures and an unusual insight into the sociological problems of dealing with them. But Mr. Aldiss puts together a BEM and a conscience in . . .

Tyrants' Territory

By BRIAN W. ALDISS

FROM the heavy and turbulent cloud layers of Askanza VI, rain fell solemnly. It pattered on the roof of the overlander making its way down into a coastal valley. Craig Hodges, sitting at



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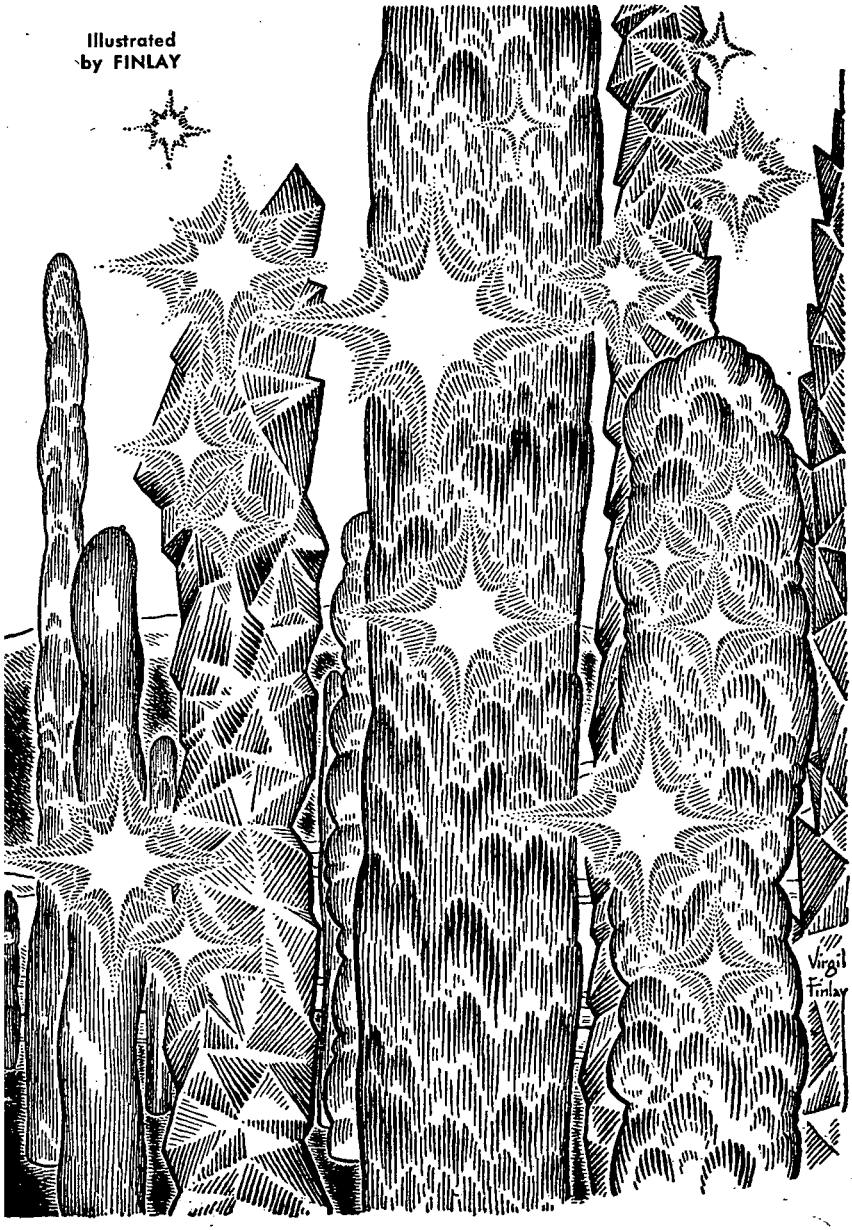

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the wheel, nodded reflectively to himself. If he and his Planetary Ecological Survey Team (PEST for short) passed this world as safe for habitation, future colonists would still have plenty to worry about from the weather alone. Askanza, the sun, never broke through VI's clouds.

Craig smiled. He had little sympathy for colonists at the best of times. All his affections went to these unexplored planets on the fringe of Earth's ever-expanding spatial frontiers. Each of them, however luxuriant, however barren, presented its own special problem and guarded its own special secrets.

Bumping its way down a mile long slope, the overlander came onto a plateau. From here, but for the rain which now gave signs of abating, there should have been a good view ahead. Craig stopped on the edge of the plateau, peering forward. He was reluctant to leave the advantage of high ground without knowing what he was going into, particularly in a coastal region. Coasts were focal areas for life on almost any planet, and a lifetime of PEST service had taught Craig caution.

Craig was not exactly anticipating anything momentous in the way of life on this moonless, tideless, grassless ball; still, any form of anticipation could be misleading on a new world.

The dwindling curtains of rain parted, dimpling away across an expanse of grey water. So Craig got his first glimpse of the sea, and his first surprise.

From the quiet face of the waters rose tall and thin pillar-like structures. Irregularly spaced, they varied in height, and rose from a few yards off shore to about a mile out to sea.

Adjusting his binoculars, Craig studied them with interest. In the glasses, the pillars glinted with a diversity of subdued color. Some were opaque, some semitranslucent. Their surfaces, as far as he could make out, were by no means regular. Some looked sharp-edged and geometrical, some haphazardly ragged, some rounded. Some were as much as fifty feet high.

Pleased speculation filled Craig. Here was something he had not met with before—a man could ask for no more than that. On first sight Askanza VI had threatened to be dull; now he knew it would not be.

THE PEST ship had landed several hours ago on a high tableland beyond the mountains through which Craig Hodges had driven. Craig and his two colleagues, Barney Brangwyn and young Tim Anderson, made their usual preliminary ride-around before splitting up. They had seen little but barren land,

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curious rock formations, some stunted trees and a large number of surprisingly symmetrical boulders; Askanza VI was no beauty spot. Then they had separated to take up their customary positions eighty miles apart at the three corners of an equilateral triangle, Tim staying by the ship, Barney and Craig moving off in their overlanders.

Thus did the PEST work. Briefly, their job was a two fold one: to discover if a new planet harbored any species which would unduly menace the farmers and other colonists; and—if such a species existed—to suggest how it might best be dealt with without destroying the ecological balance of the planet. Time had shown that the most economical way of making the necessary observations was to have three trained men sitting eighty miles apart from each other, interpreting what they saw. Old exploratory methods of hacking one's way round a planet until one eventually blundered into trouble had been superceded long ago.

When he had made a careful survey of the pillars, Craig put down his binoculars. He estimated one to every seventy-five square yards of shallow sea, but their irregular placing made it difficult to be accurate.

Now most of the rain had cleared, and for the first time Craig saw into the valley below him. It was full of moving creatures!

Climbing out of the cab, Craig jumped down and went forward for a closer look. He was now almost the required eighty miles from base, so that this busy valley might well be regarded as his Plot for investigation. Fantastic rocks outcropped from the ground as he descended. As before, there was no plant nor flower anywhere, nor even a blade of grass; although a few mosses grew by the rocks. The heavy clayey ground ran right down to the water's edge.

WHEN Craig found a suitable vantage point down the slope, he stopped to observe, raising the glasses again to his eyes.

From the complex nature of their activity, the creatures might be reckoned to possess intelligence, although it was difficult to decide what they were doing. At the far end of the beach they had raised a high earthwork which looked unmistakeably like a defense. The creatures themselves varied in size but not in shape. Craig mentally labelled them turtles, for it was to that reptile they bore most resemblance with their huge carapaces and flipper-like extremities. From the chunky shell, six limbs and a

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head protruded. One pair of limbs were legs and feet, another arms and hands, while the intermediate pair served the intermediate purpose, being used sometimes to handle objects, sometimes to be walked on. Their heads were large and clumsy, with one eye and a beaky mouth. The mouths, as Craig could see, contained big teeth. Since these creatures when erect stood about five feet high in their armor plating, their total appearance was formidable.

Many of these turtle-like beings worked about a structure which was a baffling mixture of rock and metal. Others were parading about the strip of beach. Some dug in the ground, some stood as if in contemplation.

At a sound behind him, Craig turned.

He saw now that the outcropping rocks he had passed had been hollowed out on their seaward side for some depth. Turtles were coming out at him, moving fast, some on two legs, some on four.

Seen this close, they were daunting. For all their speed, they looked enormously heavy. Their flippers, thick and closely scaled, would have been capable of felling a man. They charged at Craig with snapping jaws, a small bony antenna flicking on their foreheads. Craig did not stop for a second look.

A few of the creatures who came charging out bore cup-like objects in their flippers. As Craig turned, the first cup was thrown at him.

It came hard, flung with force and accuracy.

Craig dodged and it shattered on the ground nearby. He slipped on the clayey slope, and began to run back to the overlander as fast as he could. The turtles were after him. They made no cries, but already other turtles were hurrying up from the valley. They moved fast, jaws snapping.

The overlander was only a few yards away. As Craig reached the door, one of the cups struck him on the shoulder. It broke, splashing liquid over his uniform. He whirled; the turtle who had thrown it was almost on him. Reluctantly, even in the heat of the moment, Craig pulled out his gun and fired. The shot caught the creature full in the breastplate and bowled it over backwards as Craig swung himself up to safety. Gunning the engine, he backed away. Another fiercely flung cup struck the door as he did so.

SWINGING in a wide arc, Craig began to head his vehicle for the slopes. His shoul-

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der was burning painfully; he ignored it, so angry was he with himself for his carelessness. He had fallen into the elementary error of anticipating Earth-like behavior from an Earth-like creature. These things which looked like turtles had a ferocity and certainly a turn of speed unknown to the beings they most nearly resembled on Earth.

The overlander reached the foot of the mile long slope and stopped, its wheels slithering in mud brought down by the recent rain. Cursing quietly, Craig switched to caterpillar, shutting down the drive as the retractable tracks came into position. As he opened up again, there was a grinding noise outside while the vehicle lurched forward and then fell back again. Something had jammed the tracks. He was stuck.

Another attempt to move on dual drive failed.

Leaning half out of the cab window, Craig saw that one of the turtles was wedged with its shell broken between the track plates. Its feeble movements awoke compassion in him, even as he cursed it, for he would have to dislodge it before the overlander would move again.

He jumped out hurriedly. This turtle must have hung on and taken an uninvited ride, or it would have been left behind with the others. It was too bad for all concerned that it had attempted to meddle with the tracks.

Grabbing a crowbar from an external kit locker, Craig levered at the creature's shell. His shoulder was paining him badly. The main body of turtles was now only a hundred yards away, coming up fast. To add to Craig's troubles, night was coming on, Askanza's dull light thickening into dusk. The planet had an eleven and three quarters hour long day, which meant only about six hours of daylight in these latitudes. Not, Craig thought, the happiest of places, even for colonists.

The injured turtle gave a creaking groan as Craig applied pressure. Its shell was formidably tough and would not budge, locked as it was between plates and against a drive wheel. Craig could see he would need a sledge hammer to break it up. He climbed back into the overlander: there was no time now to do more—the other turtles had caught up with him again. A minute later, some fifty of them were grouping round the vehicle. They hammered and slapped against it until the interior echoed with sound. The light was exceedingly bad now; Crain switched on an upper searchlight to see what was happening outside. Certainly the light rattled the turtles. They

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hurried out of the beam but did not retreat far. In the reflected light, their eyes glittered emerald green. Their antennae flicked about alertly.

THE overlander was, among other things, a mobile fortress. Craig could have wiped out every creature present by half a dozen means, but killing was not to his taste or his policy. He sat for a moment high up in the cab, watching to see what would happen next.

Obviously the turtles were curious about the vehicle. They were hostile, yes, but something more than mere blind hostility directed their actions. On the edge of the gloom, they waited now with the impatient patience of reasoning beings.

Grunting with the pain of his shoulder, Craig retreated into the small room at the back of the cab. If they disliked light, light they should have. Pressing a wall stud, he sent an arc light rising ten feet above the overlander's roof on a telescopic leg. When he switched on, brilliance poured in through the windows at him.

With a pounding of flippers, the turtles retreated again, some still flinging cups against the vehicle.

"Splendid!", Craig said, and retired to the lab to treat his shoulder.

It was red and blistered, from his collar bone down to his elbow. A simple test satisfied Craig that he had been bombarded with a fairly strong solution of sulphuric acid. He annointed himself, bandaged himself, and went to view his visitors through the overhead blister.

The turtles kept their distance in a ring some forty yards off, milling about impatiently.

"I'm still within acid-cup throwing range," Craig said to himself.

He loaded the flare rifle, setting its timer to fire every fifty seconds and its altitude at two hundred feet. As soon as the first flare burst overhead, he climbed outside with a sledgehammer.

Green light bathed the land as the temporary star burned viridian-fierce overhead. While the turtles fled from the brightest light Askanza VI had ever seen, Craig got to work, hammering at the wedged carapace. He was dragging the last chunk of shell from the track as the third flare went up. By now the unfortunate turtle was dead. Taking up its great head and a chunk of shell and body, Craig climbed back into his vehicle once more, switched off the flare rifle and arc light and started moving.

The overlander responded

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without trouble now, dragging itself easily out of the mud and heading up the slope. As it did so, the turtles closed in again and began to follow. Their persistence was impressive.

Ignoring them, Craig climbed the slope. Glancing at his watch, he saw it was time for his group call with Tim and Barney. He had, of course, no intention of returning to the ship. His Plot had its little problems; but it was problems he was here to investigate.

AFTER driving half a mile, he halted and switched on his overhead arc again. In three minutes, the first of the pursuing turtles thudded up, to stand at a respectful distance outside the circle of light.

By now it was almost completely dark, the stuffy unpunctured darkness that had covered the face of Askanza every night since it was created.

Craig went below to the wireless, turned onto Frequency Modulation and called Tim. In a short while, both Tim's and Barney's voices came through, Tim quiet and deferential as usual, Barney full of bounce.

"Nothing very exciting to report here," Tim said. "No life at all visible, except through a microscope. Well, that's not strictly true; I have found a worm fifty millimetres long! How fortunate that a day so dull should be so brief. I've occupied myself taking soil samples and borings. The crust of the planet is loaded with ore. Its mineral wealth will make Askanza VI an industrial bonanza in a decade, heaven help it. Seems funny to think of the millions of years of peace it's had, and in ten years time it'll be lusty and brawling with materialism. . . . It's been pouring here ever since you two left, a steady acidic shower—I've kept figures, since they vary slightly from hour to hour."

"Just as well the ship and vehicles are fully proofed," Barney grunted.

"Despite that, the soil's okay," Tim went on. "Nature seems to have preferred the inorganic to the organic here, but with implantations of suitable microorganisms I see no reason why Earth-type crops shouldn't be grown here in a year or two. Rice probably, in this climate!"

"It's dry in this region," Barney said. "I'm sheltered by the mountains, tucked in a valley, and fourteen miles from what the radar shows to be ragged coast. It's been so mild I ate my meal in the open."

"What have you been doing besides eating, Barney?", Craig inquired.

"Since you ask, I've been fiddling with the search radio,

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among other chores. As you can hear, our reception at 85 Mc/s is brilliant, but some of the other frequencies are surprisingly congested. There's some curious mush on the short waves—sounds almost like *musique concrete* at times. If nothing better offers itself tomorrow, rather than waste my time here I'll return to you, Tim, and use the ship's radio equipment to chart the various sky layers. If the colonists come here poor guys, they'll need wireless, so a few preliminary findings won't hurt—that is, if it's okay with you, Craig?"

Craig hesitated.

"The sky's not our job, Barney, nor is wireless reception," he said. "If there are no reflecting layers at all topside, the colonists can still use direct wave, as we are doing. Have you found nothing of interest on the ground?"

BACK in his own vehicle, Barney twiddled a curl of his beard round a finger and studiously kept any irritation out of his voice as he replied.

"There are some six-legged things crawling about—look like turtles with large heads," he said. "They seem to move very intermittently, and are sluggish when they do move. Ugly devils, but harmless for all their array of teeth. I'm afraid I just can't see them in the role of Plimsol Species, Craig. Fodder for Colonists I'd call them, until they all get killed off and eaten."

Craig stared incredulously at his amplifier.

"They . . . drag themselves round on all six legs?", he asked.

"Yes. When I went over to them and kicked them, they retracted into their shells. The heads don't retract, being a bit too big for that. When in that position they look like boulders. What have you been doing, Craig? Seen any boulders walking about?"

"My boulders walk on their hind legs," Craig replied. With typical caution, he kept his report very brief, saying only that he had seen large numbers of the turtles. He made no mention of the fact that he was still surrounded by them, although he warned Barney and Tim about the acid throwing.

"This little habit would be a considerable menace to colonists without overlanders to retreat into," he said.

"You must have hold of a different species there, Craig," Barney said after a pause. "My babies haven't learned to walk upright yet, never mind throw acid. Sulphuric acid, you say? Where would they get that from? You don't suppose they build their own Glover towers?"

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Tim answered his question.

"I've found samples of normal salts that would be useful in preparing the acid—barytes for one—but you're not suggesting these creatures have enough intelligence to—"

"I'm trying to avoid suggesting anything at the moment," Craig said dryly.

Recognizing the note in his voice, Barney dropped that line of approach and tackled Tim.

"What do your turtles do, Tim? Are yours vertical or horizontal?"

There was a second's silence, and then Tim said in a strained voice, "I haven't seen any round here at all. . . . Hang on, will you? Something's moving outside. . . ."

HE went off the air. Craig sat where he was, eighty miles away over the mountains, drumming his fingers and trying to visualize what was happening. He knew, with a half-mystical certainty, that any planet was a different place by night from its daytime self; ask any child on Earth and they would say the same thing. The atmosphere changed. . . .

By now the darkness was total. Thunder grunted disconsolately round the horizon like distant gunfire.

Tim's voice came back in a minute, a note of relief in it.

"Hello, Craig and Barney. I've got the turtles too! Most curious. There must have been a crowd of them hereabouts, but during the daylight they were absolutely doggo. I took them for big stones—your boulders, Barney. Now they're getting up and walking about."

"See they don't pinch the space ship," Barney said. "Are yours travelling on all-sixes?"

"No. They're walking on their hind legs—or on their two hind pairs, like Craig's. They're pretty busy, too. Some of them are trying to investigate the overlander. What do I do?"

"Shine a bright light and they'll keep their distance," Craig advised.

"I've all ready discovered that."

"Good boy." Craig had to suppress an urge to be fatherly to Tim; his voice sounded very young over the FM. He could not resist adding, "And don't let them throw acid at you. It's painful."

"Are you keeping something back from us, Craig?", Barney growled. "You're not having some sort of trouble with these critters, are you?"

"You sleep tight, Barney, and don't worry. I'm fine. We'll buzz each other at eight tomorrow morning. Adios and out."

So they closed down. Barney scratched his head, feeling sure

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Craig was holding something back. He knew Craig of old. Both Craig and Tim sounded like they were having a more interesting time than he was himself. Promising himself that tomorrow he would go hunting turtle eggs and try a little private research, Barney settled down to read a book.

It was a collection of Conrad's tales. To Barney Brangwyn's mind, only Conrad of all the old authors conveyed the sense of a planet as a planet. He read: ". . . . Nothing moved. The fronds of palms stood still against the sky. Not a branch stirred along the shore, and the brown roofs of hidden houses peeped through the green foliage, through the big leaves that hung shining and still like leaves forged of heavy metal. This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, resplendent and sombre, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise. . . ."

As another sort of 'ancient navigator', Barney knew that what Conrad had written almost exactly six and a half centuries ago contained a true vision of the universe: that behind all the sunlight, however vivid, lay an impenetrable darkness which could be expressed in scientific terms as energy or in religious terms as God. Whatever he or the turtles might do, that darkness remained—yet he could hold that concept in his mind and at the same moment hope to outdo Craig.

BEFORE Craig retired to his bunk, he took a look at the creatures surrounding his overlander. They were still outside the circle of light, still active, though perhaps less so than they had been when down by the shore.

He stood for a long while, stolid and unmoving, looking out. The thunder was dying now as night fully established itself.

Craig considered. These creatures seemed to have three different patterns of behavior over a remarkably small stretch of territory. Where he was, by the coast, they behaved like a true Plimsol species; they were active, aggressive, curious. Where Tim Anderson was, their activity was nocturnal only and they seemed slightly less formidable. Where Barney Brangwyn was, they behaved merely like lower animals—like clumsy tortoises. There had to be a reason for this curious deviation, but as yet Craig had insufficient data to uncover it.

Abruptly he turned from the window, and climbed into the cab. Getting into the driver's seat, he started the engine and drove the overlander further up the long slope onto level and

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higher ground, until he estimated he must be about three miles from the coast. Then he went to see what the turtles were doing.

Most of them followed the overlander; they covered the ground steadily, if not as vigorously as they had moved hitherto. Many seemed to be suffering from very human bouts of indecision about coming on or going back. Eventually some forty of them grouped themselves beyond the range of Craig's light and sat themselves down to wait.

Shaking his head, he went to his bunk.

The puzzle was still with him. Unable to sleep, Craig rose again after twenty minutes and went to the little laboratory. There he pulled from the deep-freeze the remainder of the turtle who had been caught in the caterpillar tracks and began to dissect it.

He concentrated on the head first. The face was closely scaled with chitinous scales. The antenna was cartilage, and scaleless. The mouth was tongueless, with amazingly strong teeth which scooped sharply forward in the lower jaw. Pulverizing one of them and analyzing the powder, Craig found it to consist principally of iron tungstate and magnesium phosphate. Mineral substances lodged between the other teeth made it clear that these tough little weapons could be used for digging into softer rocks. A quick examination of the digestive tract indicated that much of the turtle's nourishment also consisted of minerals, broken down by microorganisms so that they could pass into the bloodstream and nourish the body tissues.

The turtle's single eye was a wonderful organ. As he worked under an optical microscope, Craig recorded his findings on tape.

". . . The turtles have both night and day vision," he said. "Their visibility spectrum must be much wider than ours, enabling them to see into both the infra-red and the ultra-violet. This is of course consistent with what one would expect from a cloud-obscured world like Askanza VI, but it also indicates a species coping with its environment with considerable success. 'Turtle' is a misleading name for these creatures, and I shall hereafter refer to them as pseudo-chelonia*. We shall then be less likely to underestimate their intelligence.

"Now I am going to open the brain case and examine the brain . . ."

The skull was extremely dense, almost defying Craig's

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* *Chelonia is the sub-class of reptiles comprising such animals as tortoises, terrapins, and turtles.*

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best saw. As he increased revs on the motor, the saw moved faster, biting down into the curving bone. Suddenly there was a loud explosion and the skull cracked.

Craig stopped the motor. Picking up the skull, he examined it. With a needle torch he peered into the hole the saw had made. The report had been caused by an implosion, not an explosion. The pseudo-chelonia had a vacuum where their brains should have been! Dividing the vacuum space, in place of grey matter, were only one or two bony and bare shelves.

Craig stared down in amazement, and the solitary eye stared back at him.

He thought incongruously of what Tim had said over the wireless: ". . . the millions of years of peace it's had . . ." but what sort of peace had reigned in these bony cavities over those long years?

THE dun-colored morning dawned to the tune of more thunder, which died away in half an hour. Craig woke late. He looked outside as he dressed.

Certainly the view was impressive, if bleak. With the rain holding off, he could see some distance in all directions. Behind lay the mountains, rounded and bland. Ahead, the great planes of land sloped down towards the sea, hiding it from sight. All around were only simple shapes, rarely broken by a stunted tree.

The pseudo-chelonia lay silent, like boulders left by a mighty outgoing tide. Only one or two of them stirred feebly.

Grabbing a bar of condensed ration, Craig jumped down onto the ground. He chewed his breakfast as he walked. The creatures spread raggedly. Yesterday's tyrants were today's sluggards; nearer the overlander they were still as stones. Further away, down the slope, one or two moved on all-sixes as if in pain towards the distant sea.

Craig sat on the nearest specimen.

"You certainly have something to contend with," he remarked, tapping it reflectively, "And I think I have an inkling as to what it is."

When he had finished his breakfast, he rose, grave and solid and methodical, to make the group call.

"I could have had turtle eggs for breakfast, only I didn't fancy their metallic content," Barney announced. "I don't mind living off the land, but not when it's so indigestible."

"I could have had some too," Tim said. "I've been up most of the night watching, and I've seen these—what do you call 'em, Craig?—these pseudo-che-

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lonia laying eggs in approved turtle style. And then along came three creatures like alligators and made a spirited attack on the egg burial spots."

"Interesting," Craig commented. "What happened?"

"The pseudo-chelonia made a spirited defense. They warded off the alligators with acid contained in clay cups. Despite that, two of them were killed and a lot of eggs taken. These alligators are fast and tough. I was able to film the whole incident for the record."

"Can you see anything of them now?"

"The alligators? No. They made off before dawn. And then with the light and the thunder, the pseudo-chelonia just seemed to be overcome by sleep. I can see a few of them now, all absolutely motionless, looking like boulders again.

"Ah well, I'm going to bed for four hours."

"We'll be calling you," Craig said. "Adios and out."

He had his day's program all planned.

AVOIDING his yesterday's route, he drove down to and then along the coast. The beautiful pillars still protruded from the sea. Overhead, cloud still merged with cloud everlastingly. The pseudo-chelonia were

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still active, and thickly distributed along the sea's margins.

Today their activities were more comprehensible to Craig, in the light of what he knew about their habits and their metabolism.

Mainly they appeared to be building—or rather, turning rocks into buildings. This they could do in two ways, dependent on the nature of the rock with which they dealt: either by scraping away the rock with their teeth, or by pouring acid into the metallic veins in the rock and then pulling the uneaten rock away. These proceedings accounted for many of the curious rock formations the PEST had seen.

Craig also knew that much of the creatures' actual food came from the rock. Like plants, they had the ability to convert inganic matter into the living substance necessary to all forms of animal existence. And through his binoculars he soon observed the skill with which the pseudochelonia, beings without fire, prepared their acids, collecting and dissolving salts in little hollowed bowls of rock.

Several times armed parties came up to investigate the man who was investigating them. Craig avoided a crisis by moving on.

At last he came to the raised earthwork he had seen on the previous day. Unmistakeably, it was artificial, built by hundreds of determined flippers working in organized fashion.

From its look, it might have stood for centuries. Craig did not inspect too closely, since several pseudo-chelonia were inside it. Instead, circling them, he brought the overlander to the other side of the fortification—and here he found the remains of the enemy against whom the fortification had been built. A litter of bones and skulls told Craig he was looking at the end of some of the alligator species Tim had described.

Selecting a fresh skull, Craig stowed it away before driving on another hundred yards to get further from the earthwork. Doubtless this was no man's land between alligator and turtle territory, but it was the first unpopulated stretch of shore he had found. A fast and cold river flowed down into the muggy sea. The pillars that grew here were few and stunted. Craig drove right down to the waterline, hurriedly launched a collapsible boat, and chugged out to a pillar that rose only three feet above the waterline. On his way he picked up a sample of sea water for analysis.

THE pillar was brown with patches of blue, the colors glinting even in the dull light,

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and just too thick for Craig to get his hands round.

When he hacked at it with a knife, it splintered easily. In little time, he had the stump of it in the boat and was back ashore.

He had cut things fine. Several pseudo-chelonia were coming rapidly along the beach, flinging themselves over the earthwork and running towards him. Putting the pillar stump and his water sample into a deposal locker, Craig collapsed the boat and snapped it into a side rack. He swung himself up into the cab just as the first creature burst round the corner, flippers swinging.

It took a snap at him. Missing, it took a bite at the overlander instead. For many a long day, the heavy metal of one wing bore the imprint of tooth marks, the most awesome teeth Craig had ever come across. Given half an hour on their own, these chaps could have wrecked the big vehicle utterly.

But now the overlander was speeding off, out of harm's way. Accelerating, Craig shook off any pursuit before stopping in a shallow inland dell to examine the specimens.

As he had long suspected it would be, the pillar was natural, an alien accretion similar to the coral reefs of Earth. It consisted of crystals of metallic salts, iron chloride and copper and nickel sulphate among others, many of the crystals being abnormally large. It reminded Craig of a 'magic' chemical garden he had grown in water glass as a boy.

His sample of sea water proved to contain traces of many metals considered rare on Earth now, including tungsten and germanium.

WHEN he had made the analysis, Craig sat looking out over the land to the placid sea. The sea on Askanza VI covered five sixths of the planetary surface. Here as on Earth, it had cradled life. Yet here, Craig was now fairly positive, it still held absolute power even over those creatures which had long since left it for dry land.

A man had in him much of the sea from whence he came. Wombed within water, he passed through a fish stage as a foetus; born, he carried all his life a tide in his veins and the taste of salt in his blood. But for all that, he had turned his back to the beaches in a way the pseudo-chelonia could never manage to do.

It was so, at least, if his theory was correct. To prove that conclusively, he needed equipment that only the PEST ship contained. Climbing down to the cab once more, he headed the overlander for home.

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RAIN came cascading down again as he touched the hills. It slowed him to little more than twenty miles an hour over the rough, so that another of Askanza's brief days was almost over before he sighted the PEST ship. Nevertheless, the journey was not entirely wasted, since it supplied confirmation that his theory was at least near the mark.

Four miles inland, all traces of the pseudo-chelonia died away. They began again after another fifteen miles; but all the creatures he saw lay face down against the bare ground as if dead, their carapaces shining dully in the yellow downpour.

Donning oilskins, squelching through the downpour, Craig hurried into the ground lock. Tim Anderson was there to greet him; the young man had seen his vehicle drive up. Something in his attitude told Craig he was uneasy.

"Coming back empty-handed!", he exclaimed as he greeted Craig. "You've not much chance of indulging your favorite hobby of parasitology here, Craig."

"No," Craig agreed. "There's little diversity in the life forms, but the wonder seems to be that anything organic has established itself at all."

As they went up in the lift, Tim said, "Then no doubt you've noticed the life forms seem to be either large size or microscopic."

"I had noticed—and I notice Barney's vehicle outside. He's back all ready then?"

Tim shot him a veiled look.

"Barney's back," was all he answered.

Barney himself greeted them in the lounge. He was consuming a plateful of canned pork, gooseberry sauce and potatoes, and demolishing a bottle of Aldebaran wine. He waved genially to Craig.

"Beat you to it. Have a drink?"

"Love to," Craig admitted, peeling off his oilskins and stuffing them into a dryer. As he got a glass, the evening's thunder began.

"Everything tied up?" Barney inquired mildly, pausing with uplifted fork.

"What makes Askanza VI tick?", Tim asked.

"By the way you both ask me, I can see you all ready know all the answers," Craig said. "Well, yes, I think I know some of them myself. I'll tell you my ideas, and you can stop me when I go wrong."

"The man's modest," Barney said.

"I admire the resourcefulness of this world," Craig said. "Its conditions are not unlike those on Earth's neighbor planet Venus which—you may remember

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from your elementary textbooks —supports no life at all. Here we have at least two tough forms of life, the pseudo-chelonia and the alligator-things, which have managed to evolve despite an almost complete lack of anything but minerals. Minerals there are in abundance, which as Tim says should make this a very prosperous world *if* the colonists move in.

THE earliest forms of growth here—pre-living forms—are crystal accretions, which rise out of the shallow seas like masts. I've seen them along the coast. When I first saw them, I had the impression of wireless masts—and oddly enough I was not far wrong. However, perhaps that is not the right end to begin the story at."

Barney and Tim exchanged glances as Craig went on.

"Let's take the turtles first. They have no brain in any sense that we know of. Instead, they have nature's equivalent of a wireless receiver in their heads. There is even a vacuum in the middle of their skulls, where bony shelves impregnated with metal form a natural triode valve. The alligators function on the same principle."

"They do," Tim affirmed. "I shot one and its brain case imploded."

"Yes. No smaller reptiles exist because a big heavy head is required to house such an arrangement.

"Their motive power is of course their own. But their—shall we say their thoughts, primitive though they are?—their thoughts are radio waves.

"Life, as we know, develops as it can. We must expect that eventually research will show why these creatures have receivers instead of brains. Nature, however, works with what it has, and here it had a perpetual source of radio emission.

"For me this is the most interesting fact of all. The silent seas of Askanza are gigantic low-powered transmitters. How it works in detail I don't know, although I suggest we find out tomorrow. Roughly, though, the main items would seem to be these. Cold levels of water from rivers etcetera sent up temperature differences in the sea which are transformed into small electric charges. These are influenced by the heavy metallic suspension in the seas. At the same time, the water containing germanium, various depths act in effect as gigantic transistors, amplifying the potential signal.

"The crystal pillars serve as aerials. Day and night they radiate the message of the sea, and the pseudo-chelonia and their enemies pick them up. Do you follow this, Tim?"

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TIM shook his head, moving from the window where, as he listened, he had been watching the first motionless turtles come to life with the night.

"I'm with you, Craig, although the way you've deduced all this fills me with wonder and anguish."

"I've only fitted together the facts we discovered—and kept an open mind, remembering the old PEST rule, 'Necessity forms the only basis for comparison between systems.' What we find on Askanza VI is the best possible operable system in the circumstances."

"That's all very well, Craig, but what first started you adding the facts towards the right answer?", Barney inquired. Lighting a cigar, he added, "And don't be afraid to boast. You don't know how oppressive your modesty can be."

Craig smiled.

"Then I must boast on your behalf. You gave me the lead with your remark during our first group call. You talked about the curious mush you picked up on the short wave. That was the call of the sea—calling all life on Askanza!"

"Ha!", Tim exclaimed. He snapped his fingers and started walking round the room.

"Craig, the next bit I pieced together for myself," he said. "What Barney said started me wondering too, particularly when he mentioned sky layers. Obviously the atmosphere is disturbed; thunder night and morning must mean something. What it means here is that the Appleton or F-layer which normally reflects short waves back to the ground is dissolved during the day. During the night-hours it re-establishes itself. Barney and I have proved this is so with the ship's transmitter.

"Working on the idea that our turtle friends were controlled by short wave radio, I saw this would explain why they were doggo by day and active by night. The signal would not reach them by day, but would radiate into space and be lost.

"Then I asked myself why your turtles and Barney's didn't fit with this neat theory. Directly I thought of locating the transmitter by the coast I had my answer."

"Yes, when you get that far, the rest's a matter of elementary radio theory," Barney said. "The coastal creatures get their transmission direct, so the presence or absence of an F-layer doesn't worry them. Up to maybe three miles inland, the beasts are active day and night, as Craig found. I was on the fringe of a skip area, where the ground wave's given out and the sky wave only reaches under freak conditions—but on planetary

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scale, such freak conditions must be pretty prevalent. Perhaps my beasts were explorers, shuffling along in a land where for them thought would hardly reach. Put like that, it makes them sound oddly impressive."

"They are impressive," Craig agreed. "And right now I can hear some of them clumping round the ship. Tim, better switch on external lights before they eat their way in."

OBEDIENTLY, Tim climbed up into the cabin and punched the external switchboard. Barney and Craig were watching the pseudo-chelonia scamper heavily for the darkness as he returned.

"It's all clear enough," Tim said, "except for one thing. God, I know it's impressive, this tideless sea broadcasting its message for millenia, and every creature on the planet picking it up. But—*what does it say?*"

Craig spread his hands wide.

"What does the sea still say in your blood, Tim? Something simple in its origin, infinitely complex in its working out; in a word: Survive! The turtles are our brothers in that they are doubtless getting the same message."

For a minute they were silent, each occupied with his own reflections. Craig was the first to speak again.

"There's one further point, Tim," he said. "Just now you mentioned that the pseudo-chelonia were *controlled* by radio. I don't think that is any more accurate than saying that humans are controlled by thought. They seem more to be *guided*, as we are guided; it may sound a subtle difference, but it's a big one. Their movements show primitive signs of individuality: hesitation, for instance.

"Finding out exactly how they behave within their own groups will be valuable work for the scientific bodies who'll follow us. It should shed a lot of light on human impulses."

He stood up, his face clouded.

"And so we've got everything taped. Or have we? We know in outline how the Plimsol species ticks. We know it's plenty tough. It can live on dirt and bite through anything, while I'd say one of those fore-flippers could break a man's leg. But there's only half of our task. Little as I love colonists, I hate to think of them facing up to these armored monsters and buckshot. My prediction is that they won't take long to lose their fear of bright lights. They may be generally doggo in the daytime, but who wants to die at sunset? In short, what recommendations can we possibly make to PEST HQ about dealing with the brutes?"

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Grinning, making a rude sign he had picked up in a dive on Droxy, Barney stood up.

"That sounds like a cry to your man of action," he said. "This is where I come in."

Craig emitted a hollow groan.

"Tell me the worst," he invited.

"No, I've something to show you in the control room," Barney said. "While you and Tim were cogitating so powerfully yesterday, I was after turtles' eggs, if you remember. I found I couldn't eat the things, so I hatched 'em in an improvised incubator. Come have a look-see."

HE LED the way up into the control room, smiling as he went. He hated what he had discovered, and he knew Craig would hate it even more; that did not prevent his seeing the diabolically funny side to the whole business.

On the control room floor was a heavy box with a visiplex top. Inside it, on a layer of sand, lay three baby pseudo-chelonia, each measuring about a foot long.

"Good heavens!", Craig exclaimed. "How old are they?"

"About a day old. You've not seen the eggs. They're as big as cannon balls and almost as heavy. The female only lays about half a dozen at a time—and that must be a pretty painful process. Better her than me."

Barney showed Craig how he had screened off the box, so that even though it was night and the F-layer established overhead, no radiations were getting through to the three creatures.

"Otherwise they'd be biting tunnels through the hull," he said. "Believe me, these babies have milk teeth like buzz saws."

He went over to the transmitter on one side of the room, unhooked an aerial, placed it in with the pseudo-chelonia and returned to the set. He switched on, starting up a music tape.

"Just in the interests of science," he said grimly. "I am going to give these babies a snatch of Debussy's 'La Mer' on their frequency. Here it comes."

Craig and Tim heard the music, damped right down, from the tape player. Barney's babies heard it in their heads. At once they began to move.

They moved uncertainly, like puppets twitched by the hand of a drunkard. First they went forwards, then they went backwards, then they shuffled sideways. Their heads rolled in ungainly fashion. Their six limbs retracted then shot out again. It was horrible to watch them.

"That's enough, Barney," Craig said.

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"I'll give 'em a bit more volume," Barney said, twiddling a knob.

At once the pseudo-chelonia were seized by convulsions. They leapt and bucked like unbroken steers, clattering against the side of the box, waving their limbs frantically, wagging their antennae. They threw themselves about like creatures gone crazy, even twisting onto their backs and running into each other.

"All right, Barney, turn it off," Craig said, in a shaken voice. Tim Anderson too looked slightly rattled.

"Those beings are blessed—or cursed!—with intelligence," he said. "Think how they must feel with an alien madman bawling inside their heads."

"Horrid, I agree," Barney said flatly. His three specimens slumped back into immobility as he switched the radio off. Leaving the tape recorder still playing its quiet melody, he got up, returning Craig's straight stare.

"And that's how the colonists are going to cope with our Plimsol species," he said. "Just a little demonstration for you, Craig. The miners and farmers who touch down here in a year or two aren't going to need shotguns or blasters. They only have to switch on the short wave to burn these critters' brain boxes out. . . . It's not pretty, but it's simple—and nice and safe. Why are you looking so grim?"

Tim, recovering, slapped Craig on the back and said, "At our moments of triumph, our leader always turns philosophical and sad."

MAYBE you're right," Barney said, leading the way back to the lounge and the bottle of wine. "He will now tell us that we've done our stuff in record time, but that nevertheless we are degenerate. The ancients, he will remind us, had a saying 'to understand all is to forgive all'. And now the PEST motto means something less than that. 'Capite Superare': 'Comprehend To Conquer' . . . Shows how the race is going downhill . . . Have a drink, Craig."

"I will," Craig said mildly, holding out his glass, "when you've finished bullying me."

As the three of them drank, he said, "If I looked grim, it was because I realized something you may have overlooked."

He sat down in a chair and surveyed the two of them.

"After your demonstration, Barney, we can do nothing but send off a report that will soon bring the colonists flocking in. Askanza is going to be a tough planet for a long while. It's going to demand a lot of work from everyone."

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"We should worry," Tim said.

"Yes, we *should* worry! You think the colonists will kill off the pseudo-chelonia by Barney's method?"

"Of course. What else?"

"In no time, one colonist brighter than the rest is going to find a way of broadcasting—not death, but something more deadly—orders. It won't take them long to find out a way either; you know as well as I do what the main sort of colonist is like: he's society's misfit, a reject. How many millions of these tough beasts do you think there are on Askanza? In no time they'll be transformed into a radio-controlled army, working, dying, killing, for a few tinpot tyrants crouching behind transmitters."

BARNEY spilt half his drink down his beard.

He jumped up.

"My God, Craig, you have the nastiest ideas!", he said.

"You think I like them? It makes me shudder just to think of the future of Askanza—but as Pontius said, once I've filed my report it's out of my hands."

Tim gazed fearfully out of the window. Beyond the ring of lighting, the turtles waited for they knew not what. Beyond them was only the blackness, warm and unlit. And beyond that blackness: a deeper blackness.

"*Our* job's finished," he said. "Let's get to hell out of here—and make sure we never come back."

THE END

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By ROGER ZELAZNY

Illustrated by SUMMERS

Moonless in Byzantium

In the Beginning, was the Word. Somewhere along the line, the Word may pass away, or be cut away. But in the end, so long as even a part of a man is still alive, the Word will Be again.

IT was a glittering hell of a machine, with ebony sides that talked to tomorrow. Its rapid teeth clicked, chewing yesterday with a sound like static electricity.

It digested the past, between mouthfuls repeating to the future, "You are mine you are mine you are mine," and mirrored its conversant in its sides.

The man before the Robotic Overseeing Unit stroked his metal-blue jaw with his two natural fingers. His prosthetic legs bent with an unnatural springiness as he paced, waiting to be recognized. He walked within the painted area, and the guard robots swivelled to follow his movements.

Finally, the panel before him

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glowed. The clicking became a hum; words poured from the meshed-in cornucopia:

"William Butler Yeats, you are charged with writing on washroom walls. How do you plead?"

"Not guilty," he replied, continuing to pace. "I not William Butler Yeats."

"It is noted that you should not be. You are further charged with the illegal possession of a name, the use of illicit vocabulary, and the possession of writing instruments. How do you plead to these charges?"

"I not William Butler Yeats," he repeated, "I no longer know what words Cutgab remove from language. What you mean by 'writing instruments'?"

He stood still, like a crow balanced on a wire; the robots ceased their swivelling.

"When you were apprehended in the Section Nine washroom, you had in your possession four sticks and a burning-unit you had used to char their ends. You were, at that time, inscribing *Sailing to Byzantium* upon the wall of that same washroom. Do you deny this?"

"No," he said.

"Then the plea is entered as 'guilty'. It is suggested that you are also the party guilty of similar offenses over many years. Do you deny or affirm this suggestion?"

"Why not?" he shrugged. "Sure, I write them all."

"Then you are guilty of a capital offense. You signed each of them 'William Butler Yeats', and the possession of a name automatically requires the maximum penalty."

"I don't sign them all that way," he slurred. "Yeats don't write them all."

"Once would have been enough, but it is entered that you state you did not sign them all 'William Butler Yeats'. Who wrote the others?"

"I don't know. Some of them I just hear, remember . . . Others, I write myself."

ADMITTING to the mechanical reproduction of words, legal or illegal words, lays you open to another finding of 'guilty' — Cutgab violation aught-aught-three, penalty ten, waived, since you are undergoing the maximum."

"Thank," he observed. "There was time when everyman privilege to write on washroom wall."

"There was," answered ROU, "but in those days, they wrote healthy, sexful things, to encourage the propagation of the species. You, William Butler Yeats, are an example of why such practices are no longer permitted."

There was a high-speed chattering within the IDP drums, then ROU continued:

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"You put your words together into meaningless sentences. You write of things which are not so, and when you write of things which do exist you distort reality in such a manner that it, too, becomes false. You write without purpose or utility, which is why writing itself has been abolished —men always lie when they write or speak."

The man's pointed platinum ears twitched and fanned wide.

"For this reason you destroy language, except necessaries? For this reason you replace language with mechanical nonword? For this reason you disassembled language, like people when they break down?" He held up a claw-like fist, then clanged it against his chest. "ROU! You reduce soul to parasite! I am three hundred year old, and what remain of my body scream at you! My soul scream!"

"Contempt! Contempt" boomed the speaker. "You have used a forbidden word!"

"And I use more, so long as I can speak!" he cried. "You not meant to do what you do! Man not a machine! He build you—"

He clutched his throat. His voice-box had been deactivated. He covered his half-fleshed face with both claws and clicked to his knees.

"First," said ROU, "no man built me. I have always existed. Inefficient man could never have realized such purity of purpose and design. I have done your species a favor and included it in my great shop. I have extended your life. I have improved upon your design. There are very few men who have protested against this, and they represented defective workmanship such as you display. Still, I salvaged what I could of them."

The IDP drums chattered once more. Then:

"There is another question I wish to ask you. I will activate your voice-box, if you will not use any forbidden words. Signify your agreement by standing."

The man rose to his feet. He dropped his hands and glared at the glowing panel.

"You could not have written all of those poems," came the steady words. "Tell me why you do the things you do, and how."

"Why?" repeated the man, searching his memories. "How?"

IT had been centuries ago, in the now-demolished Hall of Byzantium, where he had heard the last music on Earth. It was a squat structure, out of concrete-block, and it had housed the Bird.

The Bird was the last musical instrument ROU had built. Out of beaten gold, with a thousand golden eyes hidden in the sweeping slant of its tail, it had wailed in golden-throated prophecy. ROU built it when the resistance

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had been stronger, and art and recreation were still matters of concern.

He had heard its last concert, and had taken part in the following riots, which cost him a part of his left frontal lobe. The Bird was dismantled two days later. A medman once told him he wore one of its bright feathers in his wrist and another atop his vertebral column; it made him feel good at times, to know he carried a part of it around inside him.

Then, at a belt station one night, he had met a complete man.

Whole humans were seldom encountered. Some men were indistinguishable from ROU's completely automatized servants.

Nearly every man alive had had some replacement work, somewhere along the line, and the older a man, the less of humanity remaining.

But the stranger was whole, with external eye-lenses, very thick ones, and a dark, non-functional piece of cloth about his shoulders—and he was old. He wore a broad black ribbon at his throat, and what seemed a white half-tunic. He had on a floppy black head-covering and ankle-length trousers, and he leaned upon a golden-headed stick, which constituted an illegal prosthetic device. His white hair swept the ridges of his gaunt cheek bones, and his eyes smouldered out of the shadows.

"Who you?" he had asked.

"One out of nature," had been the reply. "Once I was called William Butler Yeats, and once I was a golden bird, forced to sing in the travesty-hall of my prophecy, Byzantium."

"I not understand."

"I rise on the gyre now, but a part of me lives in your wrist and your neck. You will remember song when singing is forgotten. You will speak when no one will listen but iron, and you, or a part of you, will restore the golden age to Earth."

And the whole man was gone.

But often the magnified eyes appeared before him in dreams, at times the quavering voice sounded in his head; he began to remember things he did not know he had known—like the things he scrawled on the walls.

I MUST write them," he said. "I not know why. They come in my head and I want someone else see them, share them. I not William Butler Yeats, but what he write I put his name to. The others, I don't."

"You wrote one," said ROU, "which either criticized or praised the entire bio-mechanical process."

Flatly, ROU recited:

"Take the cylinders out of my
kidneys,

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The connecting-rod out of my brain,
Take the cam-shaft from out of my backbone,
And assemble the engine again.

"Which was it?" he asked. "Much may depend on your answer."

"I not know," said the man. "It just come in my head. I not even know who writes it . . ."

"That, then, will be all," finished the Robotic Overseeing Unit. "You will be exposed to a gas which will destroy your nervous system, and the rest of you will be disassembled. Have you anything else to say?"

"Yes," answered the man, scratching the air with his hooked fingers. "You say I not have soul. You say I be dismantle and make useful. But I say I have soul, and it live in all of me, metal and flesh. Tear me down, and sooner or later a part of me turn up in you. When that day come, machine, you stop! I pray to moon and widening gyre that it be soon! I swear by moon and widening gyre! I pray to night, and I swear—"

His voice ceased.

"Contempt," said the machine. "You are a useless unit."

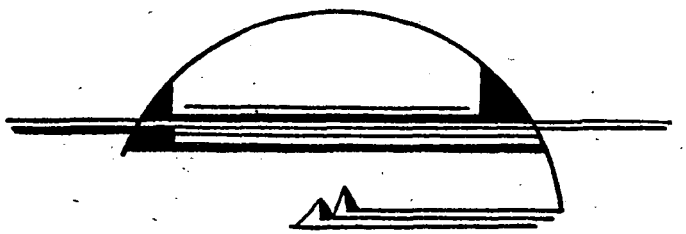
The panel went dark. The guard robots rolled into the painted area where the man stood. They carried him along a corridor, to the room where death oozed from the walls. His vocal mechanism clicked back on, but there was no one to talk to.

"I shall have name!" he told the guards, as they thrust him into the room. But they did not hear him.

He plunged sharp fingers through the flesh of his thigh as the door slammed. Choking, he bloodied his last wall—

IF I BE BOLT I STICK IN YOU THROAT
IF I BE NUT I BREAK IN YOU GUT

THE END



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the WARRIORS

By TOM PURDOM

Non-violent resistance: a paradox in terms. Yet all mankind knows that, with another war sure to sound the death-knell of the race, that an effective non-violent means of settling disputes must be found. Here is an original approach to what may be the most important problem of our time.

Illustrated by ADKINS

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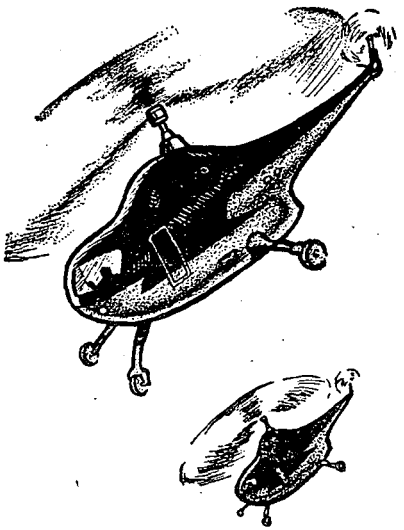


LIGHTS out, the convoy crept away from the Institute. MacFarland rode in the lead car with a driver and his chief psych technician, Crawford Bell. Three flat decked personnel carriers, flying the colors of a mercenary band, Sabo's Own Highland Regiment, patrolled their flanks. The scientists rode in the third and fourth cars in the line.

Crawford Bell had hooked a computer and a full communications set to the rear of the front seat. Now he pressed a button on the commo unit.

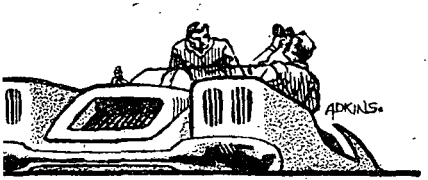
"Fourteen," a voice said over the loudspeaker.

"What's happening in town?" Crawford Bell asked. He spoke with the slow, gentle accents of Tennessee.

"They're turning everybody out. There must be fifty guys stirring everybody up, telling them their country's in danger and they'd better fight. There's a mob coming your way."

MacFarland looked across the plain to the city. He could see thousands of hand lights and a dark shape sprawled across the plain. The sound of the crowd was so faint he decided it was still a couple of miles away.

His hands tingled with excitement. This was only his third raid. He still hadn't lost his zest for modern warfare. War was a contest played for high stakes, the fortunes of nations, and it



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used every aptitude a man could have. Moving into battle under an African sky, he felt glad he didn't live in an earlier age. War was so interesting it would be a shame to spoil it with the agony and guilt of killing.

His objective was the airport. He was supposed to put Doctor Warren's team of biochemists on the midnight plane to Israel. An agent of the Department of Commerce, he had been sent to Belderkan to talk Doctor Warren into becoming a US citizen. It had been a tricky job. Doctor Warren hadn't been anxious to change countries. Only the offer of a lab on the star ship being built by the United States had tempted him. "I'll accept your offer, Mr. MacFarland—if the other members of my team accept it. Talk to them. I won't leave without them."

HARASSED by the Belderkan Department of Trade using every weapon in the Twenty-First Century arsenal of persuasion, MacFarland had wrested a grudging decision from the other four scientists. Now all he had to do was get them out of the country. But Doctor Warren's wife had warned the Belderkan government her husband was switching his allegiance.

MacFarland studied the crowd through his glasses. They must have half the city out there. He knew the scientists weren't deeply committed to leaving. If the Belderkans managed to keep them off the plane, they would probably change their minds.

"We're in for a night's work," Crawford Bell said.

To reach the airport, they had to make a half circle around the city. "We haven't lost yet," MacFarland said. "We're going fast enough to cut in front of them before they get between us and the airport."

Standing up in the moving car, he comforted himself by looking at his troops. Crawford Bell was a first-rate technician. His psych team was one of the best in the world. Sabo's mercenary "Regiment" had a global reputation, too. So did the band of mercenaries hiding in ambush. If the quality of an army counted for anything, they had a fighting chance. The position was bad but the men were superb.

He was a soldier. He thought of himself as a soldier and he planned to conduct himself like a soldier and win a victory for his country. But he couldn't use physical violence.

Thirty-eight years before, the governments of the world had finally realized international violence could no longer be tolerated. Any violence between nations, even a fist fight between private citizens from different countries, could trigger Earth's destruction.

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He knew the consequences to all mankind of any physical violence. He knew it like he knew he had two legs. He also knew that if he twisted the little finger of a Belderkan citizen, the UN Inspector Corps would arrest him within hours. The World Court would sentence him to five years in prison and fine the United States far more than it could possibly gain from Albert Warren's work.

A HELICOPTER whined above them. A spotlight pinned them from the air.

"Masks," MacFarland yelled. Seconds later he peered at the night from inside a plastic hood. His mustache, rubbing against the inside of the mask, tickled his upper lip.

The helicopter didn't drop psycho-active gas. Instead, it marked them with its light so that far off the crowd would know where its quarry was. A loudspeaker begged the scientists to remember the humble people of Belderkan.

We taxed the labor of our people to give you luxury. We built you beautiful homes. We gave you women, if you wanted them, and all the laboratory equipment you desired. We gave you old age pensions. Remember the labors of our people!

A line of automobile headlights raced across the plain. MacFarland gave an order. The lights of the convoy jumped on.

The line of enemy cars was long and moving fast. He couldn't go around their rear and they were moving fast enough to head him off and hold him for as long as the crowd needed to surround the convoy.

He switched on his mike. "Sabo, can you break their line?"

"Right. Allenby, attack the cars!"

A personnel carrier, sixty men standing on its deck, charged the enemy vehicles. MacFarland grinned when he heard the bagpipes wail.

The carrier headed toward the tiny space between the fourth and fifth vehicles in the enemy line. It swerved suddenly and half a dozen kilted troopers jumped from the deck and landed among the enemy vehicles. Fans screamed as drivers maneuvered to avoid running them over. A second squad jumped off. A third squad landed on their heels. Soon only the piper stood on the deck of the carrier, proudly erect as his mess mates risked their lives among rampaging machines.

The enemy line disintegrated. MacFarland picked out a hole eighty yards wide and led the convoy forward. As they passed the carrier, he threw the piper a salute.

"Well done," he told the mike.

"Thank you," Sabo said.

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"It was a good job," Crawford Bell said, "but we had all the advantages. Wait until it's them on foot and us mounted."

THE crowd had grown bigger. Now its roar could be heard for miles. A helicopter hovered over it, probably broadcasting the same kind of propaganda as the helicopter over the convoy.

Aiming for the airport, the convoy had left the Institute on a Northeast tack. In trying to outrun the line of cars, they had turned until they were moving due north. The mob was running north, too, and had almost placed itself between the convoy and the airport.

"Cut right," MacFarland told his driver. "Full speed ahead. See if you can cross in front of the crowd."

The helicopters spotlight irritated him. He didn't like bright lights. Turning around, he checked to see how the scientists were doing. They were all wearing masks and their positions told him nothing about their feelings. He waved and one of them waved back.

Now he could hear the helicopter over the crowd. It was describing the loss that threatened Belderkan. The situation didn't demand sophisticated propaganda.

In a world of unrestricted international trade, with a hundred and ten countries fighting to maintain high living standards, a nation had to maintain a good balance between its exports and imports. The new products talented brains could create were the key to survival. Albert Warren, inventor of several valuable life forms, creator of the currently accepted unified theory of the life process, was one of the world's most valuable natural resources. He and his colleagues were worth several battles.

Three helicopters swooped over the convoy. MacFarland ducked and looked for signs of gas. The helicopters held a position about twenty yards in front of his car and a few feet off the ground.

"Here it comes," Crawford Bell mumbled.

Men jumped out of the helicopters. MacFarland's driver reversed his engine. The convoy screamed to a halt. The men jumping from the copters hit the ground and threw themselves prostrate. In the tall grass they could be anywhere. The helicopter overhead switched off its light.

Another helicopter landed on their left flank. A dozen Belderkans climbed out and ran toward the scientists. "Don't leave us. Great men that you are, think of our needs."

From Sabo's second personnel carrier, a squad ran to intercept the pleaders before they made it

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impossible for the scientists to move. The drivers of the threatened cars pulled out of the line. Arms linked, Sabo's men managed to keep the pleaders away from the scientists.

THE two cars carrying the scientists parked next to MacFarland. "No wonder you like your work," Lauchstein, the genetic engineer shouted. The other scientists didn't act so enthusiastic.

MacFarland switched on his mike. "Sabo, clear us a path through that gang up ahead. If you work fast, we can still outrun the crowd."

"We're moving out," Sabo said.

The bagpipes screamed. Sabo's men leaped from their carriers and moved out at a trot, the whole "regiment" of one hundred eighty men in the formation invented by Sabo himself and used by non-violent fighters all over the world. Half the regiment formed two parallel lines. The other half broke into three-man squads which hunted for a path through the Belderkan squads.

The Belderkans stood up in the grass. There were about fifty of them. They tried to form a line in front of the convoy, but Sabo's men jumping and blocking among them thwarted that maneuver. A leader shouted an order and the Belderkans converged on the convoy, obviously trying to place one or two men so close to each vehicle movement would be impossible.

The Belderkans were as disciplined and agile as Sabo's troops. Men danced and jumped in the tall grass. Sabo maneuvered to break a hole in the Belderkan lines and send his two files through it, forming a corridor for the convoy. The Belderkans maneuvered to obstruct the double file and place men among the vehicles. Since they only had to hold the convoy until the crowd arrived, the Belderkans had the advantage.

"Look at it," Crawford Bell said. "It's the second time I've seen it. Look at it."

IT was a spectacle, all right. The polite dancing men, the wailing bagpipes, the bodies that never touched, never even brushed lightly. But MacFarland wasn't enjoying it. He knew how close he was to defeat. He didn't like the danger created when heated men from different nations faced each other on the battle field. So far no one had forgotten the discipline of the non-violent fighter, but the old beast still lived in the human psyche. One shove by a Belderkan or a mercenary and the tiger would roar on the plain.

His hand gripped the side of the car. Beside him Lauchstein

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said something. Then he heard Doctor Umbana.

"Childish," Doctor Umbana snorted. "Ridiculous. When are people going to outgrow these silly games?"

"Probably never," Lauchstein said. "You can't change human nature."

The bagpipes screamed triumph. Sabo had outmaneuvered the Belderkans. MacFarland's driver switched on the fans and the car leaped between the lines of running men. Outside the double line, Belderkan soldiers ran to block the exit from the human alley. They were too late. When the car shot out the front of the line, the Belderkans were yards behind.

"The crowd's got us blocked," Crawford Bell said. "It took too long."

Sabo's men were climbing onto the decks of their carriers. The crowd stretched between the convoy and the airport. Moving on a short radius, it could block them no matter how widely they circled.

MacFarland glanced at his watch. Eleven o'clock. "What have you got, Crawford?"

"Psycho gas'll break them up."

"No. Use psycho gas on a crowd like that and they may go berserk. It's been a long time since a human being died in a battle. I'd hate to be the man responsible for ending a winning streak."

CRAWFORD Bell tapped the keys of his computer. His eyes studied the crowd. The night before he had programmed the computer with data on Belderkan culture. Now he turned his immediate observations and trained hunches into mathematical quantities and fed them into the machine.

"You said you had some girls."

"I'm calling them now," MacFarland said.

The crowd was about five hundred yards away. The people were singing the national anthem of the Belderkan Republic. He could barely hear the loudspeaker above his head.

"Eagle nine here," a voice said on his radio.

"Eagle One. Can you see the crowd?"

"We're watching them."

"Attack. Hit them on my left."

He put the mike down. Crawford Bell was reciting a string of figures into the mike.

"Sound," the psych technician said. "Tell Sabo to keep his pipes quiet."

The helicopter still marked them with its spotlight. Its loudspeaker pleaded with the scientists. By straining his ears, he could hear some of what it said. The pleas made him a little uncomfortable.

What had he said to Doctor Umbana? "It's starship time, Doctor. We've abolished interna-

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tional violence. We've conquered poverty and disease. We've explored the Solar System out to Saturn and if we haven't gone further, it's because nobody thinks it's worth the effort. Where do we go now? We can't stand still. We've developed psychological techniques that turn men into brainless slaves and the pressures of international competition are forcing us to use them. To stay free, the human race has to expand. It's star ship time and we need you."

That was still true. Doctor Warren's team belonged on a starship project, and it might as well be the United States project. But even having them on the Common Market or the Soviet Republic starship would be better than letting them stay in Belderkan. Or would it? They were doing important research here. They were the foundation of Belderkan's prosperity.

There was no way to reason out which was better. Settle it on the battle field and hope the right side won. If that helicopter's propaganda was bothering him, what was it doing to the scientists?

"Sabo, muffle the pipes."

THE convoy slowed down. The crowd had stopped running and started walking. Their togas, mostly emerald green and pearl white, were made from a hard fabric that gleamed in the light from the helicopter. Through his binoculars he tried to estimate the percentage of men and the percentage of young people. The section right in front of him looked young and predominantly male. By now many of the women and the older men had fallen behind. That was something to be glad about.

In the crowd several voices screamed a war cry. Then the whole crowd shouted and started running toward the convoy.

Three personnel carriers skimmed into view on his left. He raised his binoculars and studied their passengers. It was hard to look at them with the detachment of a commander inspecting his troops. He was a young man and the girls standing on the decks of the carriers were pretty.

The carriers crossed the front of the crowd and the girls jumped off. They started undressing as soon as they hit. Running into the crowd, they offered themselves to the men.

Mike in hand, Crawford Bell leaned forward. "It's all in the timing." Tension choked his voice.

"Get it right," MacFarland growled.

There was only one girl for every dozen men, but that was enough to cause trouble. At least two men per girl forgot their patriotic fervor and yielded to op-

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portunity. Other men forgot the invaders and tried to drag their comrades back to duty. Women, probably jealous, screamed curses at MacFarland's shock troops.

The personnel carriers, all their girls dropped, turned and swept along the rear of the crowd. On each deck a man tossed coins and bills at the Belderkans.

The loudspeaker above the crowd exhorted them to remember their country. The loudspeaker above the convoy shamed the scientists for using such tactics.

"Now!" Crawford Bell shouted at his mike.

MacFarland covered his ears too late. Even through his mask he heard the sound that rose from the sixth vehicle in the convoy.

It was sound mathematically calculated to shatter the nerves of the crowd. Pitch, rhythm, intensity, had been computed by Crawford Bell's machine. Even MacFarland felt hysteria creep up his back.

Its emotions shattered by the women, the money and the sound, the crowd lost its slight discipline and its great motivation. The people staggered under the triple psychological punch.

Sabo's personnel carriers swept forward and threw a cordon of men around the left of the crowd. The convoy raced toward the airport.

MACFARLAND could see the airport through his binoculars. The helicopter still marked them with its light, but the crowd was a long way behind.

"Cigarette?" Crawford Bell asked.

"No thanks. I'm keeping my mask on."

The psych technician started to take off his own mask, then changed his mind. "They're probably feeling desperate. This is when I'd start using gas."

"It's eleven fifteen. We'll be at the airport in ten minutes." His eyes narrowed. "They must have something left."

The night wind made him shiver. He adjusted the heating unit in his tweed jacket. When he looked up, he saw the lights of the runway. Then he saw the white dome of the terminal building. Before the airport fence and the airport gate, a line of men stood shoulder to shoulder.

Crawford Bell glanced at his watch. "Here's where I earn my money." His fingers tapped the computer keys.

MacFarland's stomach tingled. He wanted to jump out of the car and push the toga clad men aside with his bare hands. Days of frustration were reaching a climax.

He switched on the mike. "Sabo, we'll have to stand toe to toe with those boys and slug it out. I want you to guard our rear.

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Have your men put a tight line behind us. Don't let the crowd get near the convoy."

They halted in front of the airport gate, less than twenty feet from the enemy line. The other vehicles pulled up beside them.

The scientists parked on his left. "You've done a good job," Doctor Warren said, "but it looks like we're not going any further."

"Did you bring machine guns and clubs?" Doctor Umbana asked. "If you didn't let's go home and get some sleep."

MacFarland stood up. "Gentlemen, we've got half an hour and a good crew of technicians." The line of Belderkans looked grim and unmoving. Their black faces gleamed in the light from the helicopter.

"Now," Crawford Bell said.

Again, the awful sound rose from the noisemaker. MacFarland tried to look indifferent but after the first seconds he grabbed his ears with his hands. It was the scream of pain and madness and the evil thing beyond the campfire. The faces of the Belderkans distorted with anguish.

Using noise was tricky. How hard did the air molecules have to strike the ears or how painful did the noise have to be, before sound became physical violence? The noise selected by the computer was supposed to be psychologically, but not physically, uncomfortable.

The noise ended abruptly. On MacFarland's right, one of Crawford Bell's technicians aimed a battery of lights at the enemy line. Flickering colors made shifting patterns on the faces of the Belderkan troops. The colors were supposed to create mental confusion and weaken motivation.

"Look at their faces," Doctor Warren said. "Wouldn't a club be more humane?"

TWO Belderkan trucks were parked behind the line. Technicians came out of them and set up lights which neutralized the lights of the invaders.

A jet screamed into a runway at the far end of the airport. MacFarland watched it taxi to the terminal building. It was the flight the scientists were supposed to leave on. He glanced at his watch. Twenty minutes.

This was where the human imagination met its test. The mind struggled to invent alternatives to violence. There could be no appeal to the enemy's reason. Conflicting interests clashed head on. Only maneuver and cunning could win the day.

He stepped out of the car and walked up to the Belderkan line. "How much do you want? My government'll give thousands to the man that lets us through. We can give you things money can't buy. Our loveliest women. A palace. Pleasure for the rest of

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your life. Don't you like money? Wouldn't you like to be rich?"

No one answered. Walking down the line, he repeated his offer. He stopped in front of a thin, spectacled youth who couldn't possibly be older than nineteen.

"You can make your fortune in a minute. The rest of your life, you can do what you please." He named a famous beauty. "Wouldn't you like her? She's on our payroll."

The youth avoided MacFarland's eyes. "I won't be tempted. I can't be tempted."

Doctor Umbana jumped out of his car. "Oafs. Peasants. What right have you got to stop us? I'm a free man. Get out of my way."

MacFarland stepped in front of the angry biochemist. "Get back," he hissed. "Do you want to go to jail? I'll handle this."

"You're the man that brought us here. Kick them aside and drive through. Won't you go to jail for your country?"

Lauchstein bellowed with laughter. "Let MacFarland handle this," Doctor Warren said. "Pete, come on back to the car."

Doctor Umbana glared at his colleagues. "I won't stand for this. We're free scientists. We have the right to travel where we please."

MacFarland swore to himself. Already passengers were leaving the terminal and walking toward the airliner.

The crowd, sounding even noisier than it had before, was bearing down on the airport. Sabo would hold them, of course, but their pleas to the scientists would be impossible to silence.

Crawford Bell jerked his thumb at the enemy lines. "They're carrying masks. We can't use gas on them."

MACFARLAND could see the future as plainly as if it were already a memory. The situation had a logic which could lead to only one solution. It was a solution he had been dreading since his first day in Belderkan.

"This is no place for psych tricks." He dropped a weary hand on Crawford Bell's shoulder. "Keep working, but psych tricks won't budge those boys. They're disciplined and they're in a good position."

"You aren't giving up?"

He turned to face the Belderkans. "So you won't be moved?" he shouted. "Well, I'm not moving either. I'm staying here until I rot. You'd better have full stomachs and big bladders if you want to keep me out of that airport."

"A fine speech," the helicopter answered, "but we don't care if you stay or not, aggressor. Only the five doctors count. You're of no importance."

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Doctor Umbana raised his fist. "I won't be forced."

"Doctor Umbana," the helicopter said, "no one is forcing you to stay. How can one force a creative mind to work? We only want you to consider what you are doing. We only want you to see how much we are willing to suffer."

The jets of the airliner whined. MacFarland glanced at his watch. Five minutes.

"You've done a good job," Doctor Warren said, "and I'm certain you'll be commended by your superiors, but you've failed. I suggest we go home and sleep." His two sons were sleeping on his shoulders. They had been drugged, at their father's request, so they wouldn't see the attack on the crowd.

"Are you going to submit to this bullying?" Doctor Umbana demanded.

"I never was very interested in this project," Doctor Forbes said. "I'm only here because the rest of you want to go. And I've been listening to that helicopter. Some of that's true, you know. They must want us an awful lot to do all this."

"They don't want us," Doctor Umbana said. "They're greedy. Those people out there are only your employers. Are you going to let them treat you like a slave who doesn't have the right to change jobs Don't you have any pride?"

"He has a point," Doctor Sani said.

"Suppose you go back now," MacFarland argued. "They'll know they can make you stay and they may not give you such good terms next time your contract is renewed."

"True," Forbes said, "but academic. You can't break their line. You might win a starvation match, but I'm not going to stay here that long. It isn't worth it to me."

"Is it worth a few more hours?" MacFarland asked. "You want to work on the starship. You know you meant it when you told me you want a chance to be on the ship. It's the biggest opportunity offered any group of scientists in history. And you admit you can't give in to this coercion without hurting your own self interest. So why not give me until dawn? There's another plane at six a.m. give me till then."

"What can you do?" Doctor Warren asked.

"I can challenge them to a duel. They won't refuse. No one ever refuses a duel."

ALL night the two sides harassed each other. Crawford Bell's technicians went up and down the enemy line, waking up any Belderkan who was sleeping on his feet. Sirens wailed. The crowd pleaded with the scientists,

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insulted the invaders and sang to itself. The girls, not yet battle fatigued, tried to tempt the Belderkan troops. The helicopters continued their sermons and denunciations.

MacFarland tried to sleep on a cot beside the command car. Crawford Bell gave him a mild sedative but it didn't do much good.

"Have you ever fought a duel?" Crawford Bell asked.

"No. This is only my third raid."

"What's happened up to now is a boys game compared to that. That's for real."

"You don't have to tell me. It makes me sick to think about it."

"You don't have to do it. It's something no government can ask you to do."

"No, but the UN Secretariat approves of it and every honest psychologist approves of it, too. Let me rest. You get the junk ready."

He wondered if anything was worth a duel. The star ship wasn't. His career wasn't. So why bother? But he knew the answer and so did every soldier on the planet. Every duel fought made killing a little less likely; every duel decreased the danger modern knowledge, which hadn't been destroyed with the weapons it had made possible, would wipe out human life. It wasn't something you did for your own country. You did it for the whole human race and all the generations to come.

At five he arose from his cot. He felt groggy but that couldn't be helped.

In the chilly dawn he took off his jacket and shirt. Bare chested, he stepped into the space between his vehicles and the enemy line.

Crawford Bell handed him a public address system. "Good morning," his voice boomed. "I hope you've had a better sleep than I got. It's easy to be brave when you know your opponent won't kill you. It's easy to stand in line and look heroic and patriotic when you know I don't dare run you over with my vehicles. But how brave are you? Are you really willing to suffer for your country? I think the men of Belderkan are cowards. I think you would still be running if we had fought an old fashioned war last night."

HE paused and stroked his mustache. Then he gestured and Crawford Bell rolled the instrument forward. It was a pole on a wheeled platform. Four handles stuck out from the pole; above each handle was a set of four dials.

"Do you know what a duel is?" He made himself look at the instrument. "Have you heard in this primitive country of the

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great duels fought all over the world these last few years? Have you heard of the champions produced by nations like Ghana, Israel, Costa Rica? Wouldn't you like to pretend you haven't?"

The youth he had tried to tempt the night before stepped out of the line. "I accept your challenge."

He doesn't know what he's doing, MacFarland thought. "We've got room for four at the pole. Who else accepts my challenge?"

Another man stepped forward. "I'm not afraid. I'll die if I have to."

The struggle on the faces of the men left in line was painful to watch. Three of them stepped forward at the same time. They looked at each other until, with a puzzled expression on his face, one of them waved the other two back.

MacFarland stepped up to the pole and grabbed a handle. Trying hard to keep their faces blank, the three Belderkans grabbed the other handles. One of them trembled.

Behind him the crowd murmured. He squeezed the handle. Pain shot up his arms and thudded through his body. His eyes closed. His face twisted. Holding back a scream, he made himself open his eyes and watch the dials over his handle. The dial marked by a red light was his. The other dials told him how much pain his opponents were enduring. Each man could end his agony by releasing his handle. Each man squeezed harder. Even as they screamed, they squeezed and made the needle move a little further right.

No job, no promotion, no scientific enterprise or national need, could have made him do this. Feeling the pain hammer through his bones, he knew how weak all those motivations were.

Through slitted eyelids he saw two of his opponents fall away from the post. His dial said he was enduring more than either of them.

HE turned his face toward the other man. Clenching their handles, they grimaced at each other. MacFarland's grip tightened. His needle moved. The other needle edged past it. They hung there moaning and shaking.

Oh God, he thought. Oh God. He made himself squeeze.

Twin shrieks cut the air. Both men released their handles and fell away from the pole. MacFarland staggered in circles, bent over, clutching his stomach, trying to turn off the pain.

"Are you all right?" Crawford Bell asked.

"Look after him," he answered, still fighting the duel.

"Look after him," he heard the other man moan.

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Hands grabbed him and he straightened up. When he saw the pole, he flinched. He couldn't do that again.

He grabbed the mike. "You saw that," he mumbled. "Who's next? Who wants to do that next?"

An aging man walked out of the line and took his position at the pole.

MacFarland stared at the old man's disciplined face. He had been thinking no one would dare come forward now that they had seen a duel. The old man looked tougher than any of the last group.

He stepped up to the pole and grabbed a handle.

"Relax," the Belderkan said. "This time you'll lose or the good thing will happen, but whichever it is, this will be the last time. Good luck."

Have you done this before? Farland squeezed to equal him. The old man squeezed his handle and his needle jumped a quarter of the way across the dial. MacFarland squeezed to equal him. Again pain hammered his bones. Again his face twisted and he moaned over his tortured body.

But it was necessary. It had to be done. This odd form of duelling had started twenty years before, when two groups of non-violent soldiers faced each other in the streets of Rio and tension mounted on both sides. Neither side could accept defeat. Neither side could return home and admit it had surrendered to unarmed men because it lacked patience. In wars fought with violence, men could lose with honor. There was no honor for the loser in a non-violent battle.

Then a man had slashed his wrists and let his blood drip onto the street. "I'll die before I'll leave here," he had said.

"I'll die before I'll give in to you," a man from the opposing group had said, slashing his own wrists.

According to the UN psychologists who had studied the phenomenon, duelling was a form of therapy for the people of the world, a necessary transition from the days when men had earned their manhood by fighting wars or belonging to groups which could be proud of their warriors. The pride of nations demanded some sacrifice.

THE needle was halfway around the dial. Still the old man hung on. MacFarland squeezed harder. He was staying ahead. How much could he take? Why didn't he die of shock? He hoped for that release and fought to keep conscious and endure a little more.

His personal pride, the good of his country, and the safety of the world, demanded that he drive the contest beyond the limit

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of his endurance; that he lose, if he lost, not because *he* had been afraid but because his flesh could endure no more.

He screamed and moaned and squeezed. The men in the enemy line moaned with him He heard Crawford Bell shouting to him to let go. Was that Doctor Umbana he heard? Wasn't that the calm Doctor Warren shouting and pleading?

And the strangest of all sounds was his own voice mingling with the voice of his opponent, two screams with exactly the same pitch and intensity, the same rise and fall.

He was going to die. He wouldn't be the first. Sometimes the honor of the nation demanded that and it was necessary nations not be shamed by their citizens. Shamed nations were dangerous nations. And after all, he was only one soldier/and in previous generations the sacrifice had been millions.

HE lay on the cot. Crawford Bell and a medic worked on him with hypos. Vaguely, he realized the aging Belderkan lay beside him.

"It's about time you opened your eyes," Crawford Bell said. "Can you hear me?"

He nodded.

"We put you into therapeutic shock. You've been out an hour. You'll be all right."

"How's my friend there?"

"He's coming around."

A jet screamed. Lifting his head, he watched it rise into the morning.

"Doctor Warren's on it," Crawford Bell said. "So's Doctor Umbana. The Belderkans agreed to let any two of them through the line and Doctor Warren decided he didn't need all the rest of them after all. Your technique of persuasion isn't one I'd like to use, but it's effective."

He didn't have the strength to answer. It always worked out that way. After a duel, what had seemed beyond compromise suddenly became negotiable. That was the good thing the old man had spoken of. That was the knowledge which had given him that strength to endure.

THE END

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The Commander died in flight. This posed a question: What could they do with his body? The main problem, though, was what to do with themselves—the rest of the crew; with all——

THE DEAD COMPANIONS

By STANLEY MULLEN

LOG, Date June 11, 2341, 1600 hours (Earth)

Ship proceeding on rescue mission (File J337b5) as scheduled. Location: Nowhere. Remarks: None.

Cannon, commanding (succeeding Horsley).

There it was. Horsley was dead. As next in line, Cannon took over. Unemotionally, the rules said. And somewhere out in the dark, empty reaches of desolation near the edge of the galaxy, where stars thin out and space pushes back hard, the ship crawled along. All motion was relative, not apparent. Stars stood still. Suspended in the emptiness between them, the ship seemed as immobile as an insect solidified within a cosmic block of black amber It seemed to hang there, motionless, as if coming from nowhere, going nowhere.

Horsley was dead. When you lose friends in space, you never lose them completely. On Earth, professionals move in and take over, there is dignified ceremony, then loss and forgetting. In deep space, nothing is ever so simple. Imagine ten men in a box. A ship-shaped box. Emotions are as concentrated as dehydrated soup.

With no professional body-handlers available, no morticians or mourners, somebody has to do the job. Disposal is a serious problem. Just put outside an airlock, the body would follow the ship indefinitely, hanging outside the ports (actually viewscreens) between the ship and

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stars. Pulverized organic matter can be used to fertilize the hydroponic gardens, but breathing air so recycled and eating fresh plants nourished by corpses is impossible. A sensitive soul recalls cannibalistic legend. Not even atomic waste converters help much, since there is always leakage, and those dancing motes in the air might be an old friend, a missing shipmate.

Ceremony is meager. You sit around with the rest of the ship's company. Before you, under a fabplast cover, on the deep-freeze slab, lies an iron-hard, frost-rimed something which might be a curiously flattened statue of someone you knew. One by one, in turn, the men speak, recalling moods and incidents, some tragic, some gently comic, some poignantly nostalgic and others ridiculous or heroic, or both. You know what is under that covering, but you do not look at it and try not to think of it. You can recall many things, but you cannot recall the dead.

Cannon did not join the others at the rite. He could not, and the whole thing seemed barbarous to him. His feeling for Horsley was no greater nor any less than theirs, but to him Horsley was dead, and that was the end of it. Or, almost the end.

In the great, dark deeps of space, the ship must go on, life must go on. Horsley was dead, Cannon took over, the mission went on. As psycho-officer, which duty he now combined with his command, Cannon knew that routine must not be neglected. Robots actually operated the ship, essential machinery was automatic, electronic brains supervised, checked instruments, ran calculations, held course, and made decisions. But day duty of imaginary tasks and nominal supervision was chiefly for morale, of psychological value. Knowledge that the ship could exist and function as well unmanned was not good for the crew's minds.

Nor for the commander's, or psycho-officer's, thought Cannon grimly.

Out there was a planet, unnamed, unlisted. Some time back a ship had gone down on that planet and stayed there. Nobody knew what had happened, and it was anyone's guess if there had been survivors, and if any still lived. So somebody had to investigate, to find the survivors if any and if necessary and if possible, and to rescue them

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if they wanted to go home. Ticklish judgments would be required, and not of the kind electronic brains could make. This was Cannon's job.

He hated his job, not because of its responsibilities, but because of the lack of them. He hated the tedium and tensions of space. He nursed his hatred, since a man must hate or love something greatly to exist at all where only a double-shell of thin metal separates him from the black edge of infinity.

Hell! With everything but the important decisions and reactions of life made for you, how could you know if you were ready for your private appointment with destiny? The answer to that was simple, fatal. You never knew till it was too late. . . .

Cannon swore volcanically. It was the sole outlet for his frustrations, for his feeling of untried inadequacy. In his heart, he longed for the good old days when men ventured space less well-equipped, astrogating by the seats of their pants, powering leaky tincans with chemical fuels, feeling their way blindly, but still poking a nervy way into the great unknown. Nowadays—

Mass detector alarms rang through the ship, echoing up and down laddered wells. Red lights blinked on the instrument panel in Controls, repeating themselves luridly in crimson washes that followed circling corridors. Relays clicked. Printed circuits and magnetic stimuli went into action, clifflike banks of vacuum tubes warmed up and delved into electronic memories. Amplifiers built up minute impulses. Complicated complexes uncomplicated complexities, and Laocoon layouts translated impulses into actions. Orders on metallic tapes spewed forth, and automatic machines obeyed them blindly, inhumanly.

For appearances sake, he went into the control room and looked around, awed by the paraphernalia of automation. Masses of robot machinery stupified him, and he felt bitterly resentful of electronic brains which solved problems without understanding them. There was nothing here for him to do, and not even a comfortable place to sit. Dust covered the universally-mounted pilot's chair.

But there was no place else to go, no place where he was needed, no place he wanted to be. He sat down, uncomfortable in body and mind. Resentment was good for

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him, he suspected, acting like a catalyst in his mind. He should give in to it more often. Not-thinking was dangerous. The human mind is not made for that job.

He wondered if Horsley had ever sat here, had ever chafed at the frustrations of command, had ever been tempted by unconventional thoughts. Not Horsley, of course. A good man, a fine man, a commander who would have unquestioningly given his life to save his men. But that unquestioning mind was the key to Horsley's life. An automaton of flesh and blood, never debating an order even with himself, never doubting the almighty intelligence and rightness of all authority, never dodging responsibility, but never acting without the weight of orders through channels to back him up.

Horsley. Cannon had been extremely fond of him, had admired his tact and sincerity, but had sometimes doubted his reality. No such paragon could exist. But Horsley had existed, had lived and died as a man. There was proof of that, back on the deep-freeze slab.

Sooner or later, the corpse must be disposed of with proper dignity. Not from laziness, Cannon had postponed thinking about it. Death was final enough. One should simply disintegrate and disappear, physically as well as spiritually. It was undignified and degrading to leave a stinking carcass behind, and expect people to slobber over it. It was indecent, and one of the few things about which Cannon preferred not to think.

When his time came, he hoped he could figure a better way out. In the meantime, when he gave the matter thought, he would figure a clean way out for Horsley. For his body, rather. Cannon refused to connect the two.

Cannon wondered ironically why the electronic brains could never solve problems like what to do with dead bodies, and why live ones behaved as erratically as they did. Did the working parts of the great devices lack some vital component? Did they ever have erratic thoughts and impulses? He wondered what the great brains thought about when they were off duty, if their inhuman memory banks and stimuli reactions ever went off-circuit or had bad dreams.

Cannon's eyes roamed the control room, the panels of gauges, the visible consoles

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of the brains, the access hatches to repair the robot machinery. Very intricate and beautiful, after a completely non-human fashion. Functional, in the best sense of the word. But what was man's function? He must have one, or the machines would not let him exist. No robots with caricatured human forms, like the absurdities of the viewscreen plays. No robots taking over humanity, enslaving it. Just the batteries of automatic machines, taking over man's work, man's responsibilities. Making man not a slave, but a drone. Man exsited, like drone insects, for the vital purpose of creating machines. And more drones like himself.

Before Cannon spread the console of manual controls. Manual controls, yes. Here only for emergency, just as the crew of men were standby technicians, in case the machines broke down. But did the machines decide what was emergency, or did he? And how would Cannon know emergency if the machines forgot to tell him?

They were nearing the planet. Instruments told Cannon as much about that as they thought it was good for him to know. He glared sourly at the emotionless gauges. As automatically as the machines and the electronic brains behind them, his mind translated bluntly indicated facts into related factors of time and distance and mass-power-ratio formulae. But the brains had done that long ago. Done it much faster and more accurately than Cannon could, with less margin for error.

Letting his mind and imagination drift off-course, he debated briefly what the crew would think if he simply shut-off all automatic machinery, disconnected the brains, and ignored the robot piloting devices. He could take the ship in on the manual controls.

He wondered what the machines would think about that. If they had built-in directives and devices to deal with recalcitrant humans like him. He wondered what means they would use to thwart his rebellious impulses, if gigantic hands like lobster claws would reach out from the cogs and coils to manacle and subdue him. If he would merely be confined to quarters under electric-eye guard, or if some kind of trial would be held. If the machines would direct the verdict and sentence him to

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some fate more grim and inhuman than themselves. How could you bribe or misdirect as unfeeling a jailor as a selenium-cell?

Somebody came along the corridor and into the control room, his human footsteps clanging along the metal deck as inhumanly as mechanical sounds. It was young Timmins.

Neither man spoke for a while. Cannon glanced up sharply. Timmins was nerving himself. Silence stretched thin and snapped.

"What happened, exactly, Skipper?"

On ship, in space, there was little formality. In port, or during planetfall or blastoff, sometimes a great deal too much.

"You mean Horsley? I don't know," Cannon admitted frankly. "Maybe we'll never know. What did Doc say?"

"Too much or not enough. My guess is, he doesn't know."

"In that case, we can stop wondering. Doc knows everything there is to know about the human body. I'm supposed to know something about the mind. Everything except what it is, why it works, and how. Neither Doc nor I know anything about people. Your problem is just too simple for Doc and me. Like asking astrophysicists about instinct in ants. Crossing gulfs of space in robot spaceships does weird things to people. Some people die of it."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough? The man's dead. We don't know why. Lots of people die, for a variety of reasons. Doc, and a lot of other good sawbones, uses the term heart-failure. He means that the heart stopped, but he doesn't say that the man died because his heart stopped, and he doesn't say that the heart stopped because he died. It's just a skillful lie to confuse the issue. Doc says heart failure. I say heartbreak. Sometimes you don't want life on the terms you can get. Would you want a job a machine can do better?" His bitterness was apparent.

"I work in hydroponics. You know that."

"I know it. You work with living things. In my own job as psycho-officer, so do I. But here, I'm not too sure of the distinction. When machines start thinking, and take time off to wipe my nose for me, I wish I could be sure they weren't alive. Or that I am.

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As captain, I'm not a man, I'm a mechanic on call."

Timmins smiled awkwardly. "If I were the psycho-officer, I'd say you were neurotic, sir."

"And you'd be right. We're all neurotic. Since I am still psycho-officer, I reserve the right to be more neurotic than any of the rest of you. It's an occupational disorder—and necessary to understanding your complaints. Have you ever had claustrophobia, Timmins?"

"Fear of being closed in? No, sir. The opposite, maybe. Sometimes it bothers me to look at the viewscreens and see the space and stars outside. All that nothing everywhere, and us in the middle of it. Even the stars seem smaller out here, not real and solid enough, as if they didn't mean much of anything when you look at them from the middle of nowhere. Makes me feel ant-high to a large elephant."

"I know what you mean, and I'm way ahead of you. At home, on Earth or Mars, I liked to look up at the stars; here, they're always looking down at me. And there are worse things ahead. Wait till you get back from this voyage and find that everyone you knew is a lot older in proportion. I got a nastier shock every time I went back. So I don't go back if I can help."

"I've noticed most people in the outposts feel like that. Some go back twice. A few, three times. Nobody more. I don't ever want to go back. Once you pull up roots, you might as well keep going."

Cannon lit a cigarette and watched smoke curl upward to the refresher outlets.

"Sure," he muttered. "Keep going, but where? A thousand planets, all more or less little Earths. Earth people. Some big colonies, some small. You find at least one Earth-type planet in nearly every system. We take it over and make a place more like Earth than Earth ever was. They get old after a while. We get old. But we keep going, looking for something new, exploring to the ragged limits of our technology. What are we looking for, and why?"

"Not adventure, skipper?"

"Is that the reason you joined up?"

"Not exactly, I hope. I had that idea first. That's gone now, and I'm not sure I have anything to replace it."

"Have you found anything new to look at? Anything worth a second look?"

Timmins smiled brightly,

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stubbornly. "Yes, sir. I think so. A kid's game, maybe. Every day I look at myself in the mirror and find out something about myself. And I keep discovering things about the other crewmen that I never dreamed was there. Things worth a second look and second thought."

"Lucky man," Cannon observed cynically. "Still bright-eyed and wonderful with youth. I envy you. In my mirror I always find things about myself I don't like."

Timmins abruptly changed the subject, or thought he did.

"About him, sir? Captain Horsley? What are we going to do with him?"

"With the body, you mean." It was not a question, not a reprimand for muddled thinking.

And there it was. Horsley was now only an embarrassment to his shipmates. Not even a deep memory, like recall tanks in the electronic brains. Just a name, or a word. Meat on the table. Nothing else mattered.

"The men are beginning to wonder, sir."

"Then they're through talking about him and thinking about their own solemn and painful emotions?"

"Quite through, sir. They thought, perhaps, if it would not take too much fuel—"

"We can't spare fuel, Timmins. I've thought about it and much as the rest of you. And our overlords, the machines, have worked it out in their hot-wire-in-vacuum minds. We can't waste fuel on this mission."

"I'm sorry about that, sir."

"No sorrier than I am." Cannon eyed his subordinate grimly. "Fortunately, there is a decent, dignified solution."

"We were counting on you, sir."

"I know. But not very hard, any of you. But I am the captain; by default, maybe, but still in command. You heard the alarms. We're approaching Planet X. Another dull, monotonous Earth-type planet, but for us, the big unknown. When we get back, it will have a number, a name, and reliable co-ordinates. Right now, we're still in free fall, coasting you might say, at full velocity. If we put the body out an airlock now—"

Timmins paled slightly. "If you say so, sir."

"Don't worry, it won't be with us too long. It won't embarrass us by hanging outside viewscreens. We'll soon be decelerating. The body will go on ahead, at our present ship's speed. Nasty greeting

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to possible survivors, except that friction will burn it up in the atmosphere, scattering fine gray ash over most of the planet. Cremation, actually."

Relief showed in Timmins' fresh, youthful face. "We should have thought of that ourselves."

"Men aren't used to thinking, Timmins. Machines do it for them. But modern man is not obsolete. We can live with the machines, but not by becoming machines. A man who can follow orders and do nothing else is a fool. That's the one thing machines can do better than man. If machines think about it, I'm sure they respect only the man who can think for himself, one with the guts to try outrageous, new, or different ideas and actions. Machines need men, but men who can diverge from the norm, tackle the untried channels, men who can discover or create. We can work with machines, but not unless we can work without them, not unless we understand the difference between machines and men."

Timmins ventured a shrug. "That's your department, not mine, sir. I guess I agree. But out here—"

"Out here, we have a corpse to get rid of," Cannon said irritably. "See to it. And don't think the future colonists of Planet X will worry about breathing that thinned-down ash in their air. They won't think about it. Spacemen die, and people forget. They'll forget us, too. Nobody cares who's body is pushing up his rosebushes. Nobody remembers the men whose bodies are following cometary orbits around nameless stars. Someday, they'll forget such people ever existed."

"Maybe it's better that way," Timmins agreed, but Cannon was not sure if the comment referred to the disposal of Horsley or the inevitable fate of brave men. He did not care.

"While you're at it," he went on savagely, "there's another thing you can tell the men. I'm disconnecting the brains and shutting off the robots. I'm taking the ship in by hand. I'm the captain, so I don't need a reason. Tell them anything you like—that I'm testing manual controls, that I'm wondering how the men will take such an action. Or wondering how the machines will take it."

"Is that the real reason, sir?" Timmins had brightened surprisingly.

"Actually, I'm doing it just because I want to. But I am

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interested in seeing what happens . . ."

—

Nothing happened. Then. The mission was a success as far as it went. No rescue, as records state clearly. Cannon's crew found the survivors, a community which had long-since reverted to the primitive, where men chased each other with clubs and dragged their women about by handfuls of hair. They were contented enough, even happy, and using his judgment, Cannon left them that way. He gave them better weapons to use on each other, and instructed them in the contriving of simple agricultural implements. He left seed and good wishes, and abandoned them to the making of their own destiny. The Ethnological committee approved his decision: such people would definitely not fit in the civilized community.

At the investigation and during Cannon's trial, curious facts came out. Cannon's crew came back alive, without the fifty percent losses expected of such operations. Came back without space neuroses. And it was learned that except for Cannon's erratic decision to use manual controls, none would have come back at all. Equipment deteriorates rapidly in space, the brains and the robot-piloting mechanism were seriously out of adjustment and would have brought the ship to Planet X as a flame-in, fatal to both expedition and personnel.

After inevitable acquittal, Cannon was kicked upstairs, as a valuable man, but troublesome. He had ideas, and impulses, which would have doomed him in bureaucracy. But in space—

Cannon and Timmins went up to the dome of the great observatory on Luna, and looked out at the stars.

"I don't know why," Timmins mentioned soberly, "but the stars still look bigger from here. And I feel bigger."

"The stars are the same size," Cannon argued, "and so are you. Here. Out there, you're a lot bigger."

Timmins scowled with embarrassment. "I do think I grew up a little out there. After you took over the ship and brought through your mission, by hand. I realized suddenly that I had been very young when I joined-up, and that the kind of adventure I was looking for never really existed anywhere."

"You still want adventure, don't you? It's still out there, wherever we go, whatever we

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do. Adventure is still what it's always been — just taking your fate in your two hands and going someplace to see what happens to you. Adventure is never dead, unless we are. But I think I know now what all of us are really looking for . . . out there."

"What's that, sir? Something big and mystical?"

"No, something very small, but very important to us," Cannon said, staring upward at the stars. "Ourselves . . ."

THE END

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DANGER, RED!

By O. H. LESLIE

ILLUSTRATOR: SUMMERS

This little dictator was going to ram regimentation down the throats of the people even if they had to kill HIM to do it.

THE GHOST writer was a young man with gray hair along both temples. This distinctive feature was the only pride he took in his appearance, for the rest of his face was too bony, the mouth too wide, the eyes too hound-dog sad. His name was Gar Mitchell.

Dr. Solomon Withers, Director of the Emotional Index, interviewed him in the doctor's own library, a sprawling, book-crammed room that smelled of tobacco and leather and burnt charcoal. He was flattered at the idea which Gar Mitchell presented to him. Yes, an autobiography *would* be a contribution to scientific understanding. And there *was* no reason to be shamefaced about employing a professional writer to do the job. After all, his forte was science.

"I'm no Hemingway," he told Gar jovially, twirling a cigar between his fingers. It was a slim cigar, its shape carefully chosen so as not to look unctious when stuck in the doctor's small-boned, boyish face. Dr. Withers was a handsome man in his early sixties, and he took pride in his appearance.

"Neither am I," Gar said. "A Hemingway, I mean."

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The doctor laughed. It was a good answer, and Gar knew it. He had felt from the start that the interview was a stagey affair. They were both playing roles, and he had to remember his lines.

"Nevertheless," Dr. Withers said, "your previous efforts proved your ability. But don't misunderstand me, Mr. Mitchell — or may I call you Gar?"

No, Gar thought dryly. *Call me Mr. Mitchell.* "Of course," he said aloud.

"Well, Gar, this is the point. I'm not interested in glamorizing my rather dull life. But what I want to leave posterity is the factual account of my life's work. I want to leave history the truth about the Emotionex."

Gar puzzled over this cue. Then he knew what he was supposed to say.

"I don't know, Dr. Withers. I won't be much good at explaining the Index. Plenty of good factual works already. I sort of lean towards *humanizing* a biography."

"And why not?" the doctor beamed. "Why not indeed?" He was so pleased by this response that he actually lit the cigar. "Nothing duller than a textbook, Mr. Mitchell—Gar. I want to tell the *human* side of the story. How I developed the Emotionex, the problems I had convincing Washington that the idea was sound, the opposition I faced—"

"That's more what I had in mind, Doctor."

"Yes. Yes," Dr. Withers said, drumming idly on the desk, a blue cloud already over his head. He had the distant look Gar recognized in many of his clients, the inward view of the day their autobiographies would be in book form, lauded by the *New York Times* "*. . . a valuable contribution to a vital subject*" featured in Brentano's window "*It's here! The book all America is reading!*" and signed by the modest author for relatives and friends "*. . . to Maybelle, my inspiration.*"

Gar coughed politely, and the doctor's reverie ended abruptly.

"Of course," he said briskly, "I want to give you a solid background of the Emotionex. I want you to know as much as I—barring technical matters, perhaps—about its workings. I'll arrange special permission for you to visit the Central Control building. I'm sure you'll find it very interesting."

"I'm sure I will," Gar said.

The doctor stood up, and the play was obviously over. But

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Gar couldn't resist one unrehearsed line.

"Dr. Withers, I wonder if I can ask you—"

For a moment, the doctor looked annoyed. Then the mood passed, and he was chuckling.

"I know. Most people are curious about it. You want to know if I, myself, am Indexed."

Gar reddened. "I'm afraid you've guessed it."

"Then look for yourself."

The doctor rolled back the sleeve of his brocaded smoking jacket. The faint blue letters on the underside of his forearm consisted of only three figures: SW–1.

"Low number," Gar murmured. "Mine's M79807J."

Dr. Withers snapped the sleeve back into place.

"A car will call for you at nine tomorrow. You'll be taken directly to the Central Control building. See you there."

"Yes, sir," the ghost answered, and passed silently, as ghosts should, out of the doctor's house.

Being a young man, Gar Mitchell was delighted with his first view of the Emotional Index's Central Control building. It was an airy, glass-enclosed, round-doomed structure just twenty miles north of Kansas City, Kansas. But it wasn't the architecture of the building which delighted him—it was the occupants. Seventy percent of the Emotionex staff was female, and they seemed to have been chosen with attractiveness as a prime hiring consideration.

He was sorry now that he had worn his gray sack suit, and that his morning shave had been cursory. But the lovely sloe-eyed technician who took him in charge didn't seem to mind. Her name was Drusilla Free. She made a sexy joke about her last name, and Gar blushed.

"Dr. Withers told me you're a writer," she said, leading him into a chrome-steeped, red plush waiting room. That's something new. Usually I give the inspection tour to Congressmen and such. Going to do a book?"

"Something like that."

"Well, the doctor's given you carte blanche. That's pretty unusual. Even *Time-Life* got only limited inspection privileges." She was studying his face, trying to determine his status. Drusilla Free had long blonde hair which she wore Godiva-style, tied in a pretty bowknot at the small of her back. Her powder-blue technician's uniform was cut

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with the closeness of a bathing suit. The effect was unprofessional, but Gar wasn't complaining.

"Just what do you do here, Miss Free?"

"Statistician. My business is figures."

Gar thought of a stale joke and abandoned it. "Quite a place. Afraid you'll find me rather dense, though. Never did understand this electronic stuff."

"I'm used to dealing with laymen," she said cooly, and Gar blushed again.

He followed the girl through a maze of offices, hard-put to keep pace with her fast-stepping high heels. Her long blonde hair streamed out behind her like a golden flag, and her commentary concerning the various departments of the Emotionex Center was clipped and mechanical. The bulk of the activity in the lower part of the building seemed to concern statistical duties, and the whirring, clacking, and humming of computors pervaded the atmosphere. Gar had absorbed very little by the time the first-floor tour had ended, except possibly an appreciation for the manner in which Miss Free walked.

His interest increased on the second floor, however, where the laboratories were located. In a long antiseptic room, filled with sunlight and pretty laboratory workers, the tiny Emotionex cathode tubes, bright blue and thin as matchsticks, were being produced by the thousands, ready for insertion in the forearms of all U. S. citizens over the age of fourteen. Gar witnessed an actual operation in a laboratory section devoted to such experimentation. He watched the white-coated lady interne make a neat incision in the arm of a young girl, causing only slight bleeding, and quickly insert the little blue tube. Her deft fingers stitched the wound with the finesse of an experienced seamstress. When she was finished, only the pale serial number of the Emotionex instrument showed through the outer skin.

"Swift and painless," Drusilla Free said gayly.

"Yes," Gar answered, his own forearm pulsating painfully in empathy. He watched the young girl staring at her arm, the tears standing in her eyes. The Emotionex tube would be there for good; it was a Federal offense to cause its removal.

"Now let's get to the heart of the Center," his guide offered. "The Control Board."

They entered through a

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sequence of electric-eyed doorways, halted each time by a grim - faced male security guard who asked biting questions about the purpose of their visit.

Then they came to the great domed room which housed the central unit of the Emotional Index—the massive master control board which indexed the emotional temperature of the fifty-one United States.

Gar was really impressed this time, and a look of almost childish wonderment and awe crossed his pale, bony face and caused Drusilla Free to chuckle with amusement.

"Really something, isn't it?" She smiled and squeezed his elbow. "I get little chills every time I come here. It's like a million Christmases, like fireworks, like—" She ran out of metaphors, and leaned against him like a lover hushed beneath the mystery of the stars.

The Master Control Board of the U. S. Emotional Index swept a hundred and fifty feet in a great arc around the room. Its base color was jet black, and the map which depicted the United States and territories was outlined brilliantly in white. But it wasn't the enormity of the map which caught your breath. It was the glittering, dancing, corruscating, sparkling display of half a million tiny colored lights across its face. Blue winks and red blinks, white flashes and yellow flickers, green and brown and orange and purple and a hundred other hues rippled ceaselessly over the giant board.

For the first time, Gar noticed the bank of high-set swiveling leather chairs at the base of the board. In the center chair, a familiar little figure in a burly tweed suit spun around and smiled towards them.

"Gar, my boy!"

The doctor hopped off his perch and skipped towards the Ghost like a high-spirited schoolboy. He patted Miss Free's waist paternally, but kept his small hand there while he spoke to Gar.

"Impressed?" he grinned.

"Very. I had no idea—"

"And this is only the Master. There are many more Index boards in the other sections, each one pinpointing smaller areas across the country. The varigated colors, as I'm sure you know, represent various wavelengths of emotion throughout the nation at this very minute—all the way from mild displeasure to wild joy and murderous anger." He frowned suddenly, and looked

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over his shoulder at the board. "Anger . . ." he said musingly.

"What is it?" Drusilla asked.

"Eh? Nothing, nothing. Well, how are you treating our friend, Drusilla?"

"She's doing fine," Gar said loyally.

"That's good. But I think I'll take over from here, Drusilla dear. You can run along.

Drusilla did, and the doctor watched her retreat with thoughtful interest. Then he snapped out of the mood and rubbed his hands electrically. "Well! Now let's you and I talk a bit."

They paced up and down the length of the winking board, the doctor strutting with his hands behind his back, Gar ambling along after him, trying to catch his words.

"Crisis," the doctor was saying. "Crisis. That's what finally sold the idea, Gar. For two years after the War, I and my associates pleaded with the government to establish an emotional indexing system, but they refused to accept the idea. Not even the Cleveland riots, or that bloody revolt in California, made them see the urgent necessity. But sooner or later, they had to face it. We're living in explosive times, Gar. More dangerous than the world has ever known. The war was one thing; terrible enough, but at least it gave us good clean channeling of the emotions. Fight, kill, avenge—good clear emotional direction. But afterwards — chaos. Ever-increasing disorder and anarchy and emotional peaks and valleys. Crisis, and the Index became a must. A must!"

He paused, and dropped his voice conversationally. "You're tapping all this, of course?"

"What?" Gar grinned lamely. "Sorry—I forgot." He reached in to touch the machine in his pocket. "All set now."

"Yes," Dr. Withers repeated. "Crisis. The Index was mandatory—a clear necessity. A method to keep track of all emotions as they swept through the human organisms, a means of detecting group hatred and violence before it reached the danger point. A precursor of crime, a warning of imminent revolt —the Index has provided us with the first effective means of taming the wildest beast of all—the emotion of man."

He looked very pleased with this speech, and ended it by jamming a cigar between his teeth.

One of the Board workers,

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a brunette with horn-rimmed glasses, came up quietly behind them, and finally touched the doctor's shoulder.

"Eh? What is it?"

"Pardon me, Dr. Withers. You wanted to be informed about the Red condition. It's extended beyond Sector 40."

"What's that?" the doctor looked bewildered.

"You wanted to be informed, sir. The pattern is distinctly unusual—"

"Don't tell me what's unusual!" The cigar jumped. "I'll decide that for myself."

Gar cleared his throat. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing we can't handle."

The doctor walked towards the center of the control board, squaring his narrow shoulders. Gar followed closely.

"The paths of human emotion are strange. Sometimes there are — discrepancies. Unusual formations. Coincidences?"

"What kind of coincidences?"

The doctor took the cigar from his mouth and waved it towards the California coast line.

"See that Red pattern extending from Oakland to Death Valley? A direct mass movement of the red lights between the two points. We noticed it early last week."

"What does it mean?"

"Can't tell exactly. There's anger, that's for certain. Red is the color of the Anger wavelength. But it's so oddly concentrated—"

"There are other red lights on the board."

"Thousand of them!" Dr. Withers snapped. "People get angry all the time. But the pattern is too steady, too consistent. It's a freak, of course. A crazy coincidence—"

"I see," Gar said.

"We're running a local check of the area. We'll pin down this anger. The California Index board has been working all morning. We'll get the answer."

He seemed to be calmed by his own explanation. He guided Gar into an adjoining room, where smaller versions of the Emotionex Board were flashing their own colorful varieties of light patterns.

The operator of the California Index was a chubby young man, given to easy perspiration. The dew had settled heavily on his round face as he made notations on the pad in front of him.

"Well, Conners?" Dr. Withers said. "Pinned down this little situation of ours?"

"Yes, sir. The Anger pat-

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tern seems to be heavily concentrated in the city districts of Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other large population centers. However, there seems to be some overflow into the smaller counties—"

"You're being vague, Conners. I could tell that much from the big board. You keep working on it. If the pattern continues until tomorrow, contact the Service and get them to investigate. Might be a riot brewing, or maybe that National People's movement again—"

As they walked off, Gar said: "The Service?"

"Secret Service," Dr. Withers frowned. "They come into the picture when a dangerous emotional pattern is reported by the Index. Not that I think anything's wrong."

"Of course."

"But you can't be too careful. The nation is full of unrest. I remember what I told Congress six years ago, when I testified before that committee. I told them—you taking this down?"

"Yes, sir. Recording machine's on, Doctor."

"Good, good. 'Gentlemen,' I told them . . ."

Gar's first week was confusing. It was a bad time to learn the operational procedure of the Emotional Index, for the staff of Emotionex were somewhat confused themselves.

On Monday of the second week, Drusilla Free said: "Red pattern's spread northeast as far as Salt Lake. And there seems to be a similar pattern coming from as far north as Seattle. Dr. Withers doesn't seem too worried about it, but other people are concerned . . ."

"What about the Secret Service?" Gar asked. "Haven't they uncovered anything?"

"No. Nothing very much. They've been questioning people all week, people whose individual Index shows a constant Anger emotion. But they haven't discovered anything worthwhile."

"Sounds like something brewing," Gar said casually. "Or maybe the doctor's right. Maybe it's just a matter of coincidence . . ."

"Coincidence!" Dr. Withers said that same afternoon. They were working in the doctor's book-lined study, and the little man's demeanor had lost the relaxed air he had worn only a week before. "Anybody can get angry, Gar. For a thousand reasons. Look!"

He rolled up the sleeve of his

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smoking jacket, and shoved his arm beneath Gar's eyes. Under the pale blue number, SW-1, the Index tube was glowing a faint red.

"See?" he said. "I'm angry now!"

Then the doctor laughed abruptly, rolled down the sleeve and tipped back in the swivel chair. Gar looked absently out of the study window at the dappled pattern of light and shade on the lawn.

"Well, let's get going. Where was I, Gar?"

"You were discussing your speech before the committee."

"Oh, yes. Well, I told them the plain facts, the unvarnished truth. The world had learned little or nothing from the war. All the hydrogen bombs in the universe couldn't change the one factor that kept man chained to violence and chaos. Emotion. Raw emotion! Unless intellect found a means for keeping track of the wild paths of human feelings, the country was doomed to a succession of riots, self-inaugurated political factions, private armies and parochial wars, looting, bloodshed, turmoil, total disunity. Emotion had to be checked, tabulated, just as surely as if it were a chronic disease whose only hope was constant vigilance and surveillance. You sure that machine is on?"

"Yes, sir," Gar said, tapping the gadget in his pocket.

"Good. Well, I finally made them listen to reason. Within a year, the Emotional Index Act was the law of the land. Within six months after the enactment, insertion of the Index tubes was 90% complete. And the Index began showing results already. You remember, of course. That business in Ohio . . ."

"Oh, yes. The Ohio Massacre."

"Please!" Dr. Withers looked pained. "Don't refer to it by that vulgar name. The Ohio Insurrection is the accepted phrase. Without the Index to detect the surge of violent emotion in that area, there would have been a far more dreadful result. As it is, the information the Index provided the Government helped them quell a treasonable revolt which could have caused the lives of many thousands."

"Seems to me there *were* thousands killed, Dr. Withers."

"Hundreds! Only hundreds! The facts are grossly misquoted. The Government troops killed only a few hundred of the rebels. And it was a necessity. Nobody denies that."

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"Of course," Gar said.

The telephone rang, and Dr. Withers snatched the receiver from its cradle, and barked "Well?" He listened in silence for a moment, and then slammed it down again.

"Anything wrong?"

"The anger pattern," the doctor said. "I just don't understand it! The pattern has blanketed Idaho and Montana and is coming southward rapidly. Yet the Service can't seem to detect any open hostility anywhere we send them."

"That's seven states in less than two weeks," Gar said mildly. "California, Nevada, Arizona, Oregon—"

"I know, I know! You don't have to list them." He scratched his head vigorously. "I suppose I should get over to the Control Board—"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let's finish this chapter first. Then we'll see."

The red lights winked across the master control board of the Emotional Index, a bloody swath across the western coast of the United States. Gar stared at the floodtide of angry red lights, until he felt the breath of Drusilla Free at the back of his neck.

"Look," she was saying.

"What is it?"

"In the East. Massachusetts and New Hampshire—"

"I don't see what you mean."

"We're getting an Anger proportion that's almost thirty percent above normal for those states. And that's only since Monday. If it keeps up, we may have both coasts covered by the end of this week."

"Can't they do something?" Gar said.

Drusilla shrugged. "Nothing to do. No harm is being done. There's no violence anywhere, no arming, no rioting. People are just—angry."

"How's the doctor taking it? Haven't seen him since the beginning of the week."

"He's upset, of course. The Government can't find anything wrong, so they're questioning whether the Index might be faulty. That's got him on edge."

"What do you think about it?"

"I don't think," the girl said, rubbing against his arm.

It was twilight outside the doctor's study, three weeks from the inception of the Withers autobiography. The doctor paced the carpet in the fast-darkening room, until Gar reached over and snapped on the desk lamp.

"Eh?" Dr. Withers said, startled.

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"Just turning on the lights," Gar said.

"Oh. Where was I?"

"'A new interpretation of freedom.'"

"Did I say that? Not bad. Might make a chapter heading out of that, Gar."

"Yes, sir."

"A new interpretation of freedom," the doctor repeated. A new kind of security for the nation, a protection against the untethered and dangerous emotions. It's ridiculous to say that the People were against the Index. The only real objectors were the radicals, the professional do-gooders, bleeding hearts, the hypocrites cackling about the rights of man. But they were the vocal ones, Gar, that was the trouble. They were vocal, and the great masses who supported the Index in humble silence—they were never heard from. So you might get the erroneous impression that America didn't *want* the little blue tube in their arm. Wrong! Dead wrong! America wanted the Index. America *needed* the Index. That's a fact which history will support. That's my theme, Gar. Work on it. See if you can develop a title. Something like, History is on My Side."

"Yes, sir."

"What's the matter with you, Gar?" The doctor peered at him. "You look sleepy. Sure you're listening?"

"Oh, yes, sir. And if I did miss anything—well, there's my little machine."

"Hmm. I guess you're worried about the Anger pattern. Well, forget it. I made a careful check on the Index this very afternoon. Working smooth as ever. Not a thing wrong with the mechanism."

"But the pattern. That hasn't stopped, sir?"

"Stopped? On the contrary, It's spread. East Coast has it down to Georgia and part of Florida. And it shows signs of heading west to Alabama and Mississippi."

"Any idea what it all means?"

"How should I know?" The doctor's voice rose indignantly. "That's the Government's job. I supply the emotional facts. They've got to do the policing!"

"Yes, sir," Gar said, yawning.

It was the end of the third week.

In the Emotional Index's great domed room, Gar Mitchell watched the half-million tiny lights on the giant master control board dance and wink, and the prevalent motif was red.

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Great splashes of red washed up and down the east and west coast of the United States. Red swirled around the southwestern and southeastern areas of the nation. Red was creeping slowly along the northern section and down the Great Lakes area, over the Dakotas and Wisconsin and Illinois . . .

"It's crazy," Dr. Withers murmured, his eyes on the spreading crimson lights. "It doesn't make any sense. There's no sense to it!"

Drusilla Free touched him gently. "Would you like some coffee?"

"No, no!"

"I'll have some," Gar told her. "Looks like we're in for a long seige. Dr. Withers won't leave until the next report from the Service."

The doctor whirled to him. "Take this down, Gar. Let's not waste time. On that chapter concerning the Ohio Massa—the Ohio Insurrection. I have some thoughts on the opening. I want you to dig up the articles that appeared—"

A technician interrupted. "Sorry, Doctor. Telephone for you from Washington."

"Washington?" The doctor's face paled. "Maybe they've learned something—" He scrutinized the board once more, and grimaced at the ever-increasing redness of its winking lights. Then he muttered something and followed the technician into another area of the floor.

He returned some five minutes later, and his round boyish face was exuberant.

"Now we're getting somewhere!" He rubbed his hands until the skin made dry, crackling noises. "Now we'll get to the bottom of this!"

"What's happened?" Gar said.

"The Service finally tracked down some of the instigators of the Anger. *Agents provocateurs,* spreading their poison across the country, silently, stealthily—a national movement against the government—"

"Who are they?" Drusilla said. "What do they want?"

"Who knows? A thousand and one senseless causes sweep this mad population of ours. The whole world is psychotic! But now we're tracking them down. The Index hasn't failed us!"

"But the Anger spread so fast—"

"Of course! The tempo of madness. The heedless speed of neurotic imbalance! From one to another, these rebels have been passing their anger, until it's spread like a plague

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across the country. But now we'll stop. Now we'll fix them—"

"Speaking of trouble," Gar said softly, "look."

Their eyes returned to the great board. Despite Dr. Withers' joyful announcement, the grim waves of red light had now almost completely inundated the white-outlined map. The concentration of red was so pronounced that the one area still relatively unbloodied stood out from the rest like a white ship in a crimson ocean.

"Kansas," Drusilla breathed. "They're surrounding Kansas,"

"Nonsense!" The doctor's own face was crimsoned by a rush of blood. "It's a coincidence—a trick. The people want the Index. The people *need* the Index."

"Dr. Withers! The brunette technician, her horn-rimmed glasses in her hand, came to their side. "Doctor, there are crowds outside the building."

"Crowds? What are you talking about?"

"People. Lots of them. Just watching the building. I don't like it, Doctor—"

"You must be mistaken. What do they want? Ask them what they want!"

"But there are thousands of them! They're like a mob—only they're so very quiet—"

Now the red lights on the giant board were flashing violently, and slowly covering the area of Kansas.

"Call Washington," Dr. Withers said evenly. "Call the Secret Service. Tell them what's happening. Tell them to send help at once. Call somebody—"

"It's no use," Gar Mitchell told him. "They've been waiting a long time, Doctor. They've been moving quietly, planning, doing nothing overt. But the Anger has been building in them, Doctor. Building until the time came to make a move . . ."

"What are you saying?" The little man stared at him, his eyes wide and frightened. "How do you know all this? What's your part in this business, Mitchell?"

"A leading role," Gar said.

He lifted the tape machine from his pocket. But it wasn't a tape machine. When he flicked the lever that began the inexorable process of the mechanism, Drusilla Free moaned with fear, and Dr. Withers screamed like a woman. When Gar hurled the explosive device towards the great Index board, they could glimpse the glowing red tube in his forearm.

THE END

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THE ONLY ONE THAT LIVED

By ROG PHILLIPS

Here's a magically written tour de force, a touching and tragic story of an alien trapped in the swamp of humanity's conflicting emotions.

JANUARY 1, 2357. Hello Mr. Diary. My name is Mr. Both. I had another name at one time. It was Ten. No Mr . . . I was named Ten because I was the tenth, and the only one that lived. The first nine died from the operation. I was given the name Both by my master's wife Gerta and the title of Mr. was conferred on me by my master during a quarrel they had. I don't remember what that particular quarrel was about. In the midst of it Gerta shouted in her high pitched angry voice, "I hate you and your monster Both!" My master smiled and said, "Well, well. My monster Both." Then he turned to me and said, "Hello Mr. Both." I was very pleased with the name and from that time on I refused to answer to any other name. Everyone considers me not very intelligent because I refuse to answer to any other name or even to just Both without the title. I like being considered not very intelligent.

I am intelligent because of the operation. I am the only member of my race who is intelligent.

I am not human.

January 5, 2357. My master's wife Gerta does not like me. She fears me, she is sometimes fascinated toward me in what I suspect is the same way she would be fascinated toward the brink of a precipice. At least that is what my master said to her today during dinner. It upset her so much she couldn't continue eating, so it is probably true.

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I know that sometimes she is sexually attracted to me with the same smoldering intensity she exhibits toward men who are not my master. She smells differently when she is that way. When she is that way toward a man who is not my master she slips a note to the man or whispers in his ear. Then for a period of a week or two she goes shopping every day and goes visiting every night. After that flurry of activity has ended she settles down to staying home and quarreling with my master, choosing almost anything that he does to be angry about.

My master never quarrels. He is always happy but in different ways. Even when his wife Gerta is very angry and shouting very loud he is happy, but then there is a difference, his happiness has a knife edge. I suspect that he hates her. He has never shown in any way that he hates her. He is happiest when she is in one of her shopping and visiting periods.

My master's name is Boris.

January 9, 2357. I go to school every day. Boris is my teacher. Sometimes during the school session there are other men present too. They take no part. They sit and watch my master and me and look at one another and make facial expressions of surprise and amusement. Sometimes they look at me strangely as though they are trying to decide how intelligent I am. They fear me. They smell differently when they fear me. Once, a long time ago, I broke the arm of a man. It was an experiment, and I learned from it that the sour smell that came to men when I got near them was caused by fear. I had not known that before. I had thought perhaps that in their way the men were sexually attracted toward me.

My master punished me for breaking the man's arm. Because he punished me I did not tell him it had been an experiment. I told my master's wife Gerta when he wasn't there. She has never feared me.

I think my master feared me when I broke that man's arm, but I can't be sure.

He has never feared me any other time.

January 13, 2357. Boris left yesterday on a trip to First Colony. I have never been there so I don't know where it is. He is to be gone four days.

He did not want to make the trip.

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There is another man in the house. His name is Stuart. He arrived a few hours before my master left. He came from First Colony.

The trip has to do with something called renewal of contract and salary cut. No one explained to me what those expressions mean. I don't know of my own knowledge what the trip is about.

Gerta is sexually attracted to Stuart. It happened suddenly when he had been here about half an hour. She and Boris were taking Stuart around the house. I was opening and closing the doors for them as I have always done when we have company. Gerta turned her ankle on the stairway down to the controls room and started to fall. Stuart was just behind her and caught her by putting his arms around her. I was below her on the stairway and turned when she started to fall. I saw the whole thing. Her arms had gone up and Stuart's arms went under hers and around so that his hands pressed against her breasts, which are quite large compared to those of most of the women who have been here.

He tried to shift his hands so they would be under her breasts. She was too off balance. He might have succeeded in changing the position of his hands anyway but suddenly she clamped her hands over his and held them where they were, and her smell changed. He lifted her then until she could stand. He pulled his hands out from under hers and gripped her shoulders. By then my master had come beside them. He did not know what had happened.

Stuart was very upset about it for some reason. Before he had smiled quite often at Gerta. After, he avoided looking at her as much as he could. Once when Boris was talking about one of the valve combinations and looking the other way Gerta caught Stuart's eye and let her eyes get very round and with a soft expression around her lips. Stuart looked into her eyes as though he were fascinated in the same way he would be toward the brink of a cliff.

When my master Boris left to go on the trip to First Colony Gerta and Stuart watched him climb into his ship and rise up from the garage. While the roof of the garage was closing Gerta moved over so that her hip touched Stuart's. He moved away as though something red hot had touched him. He mumbled,

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"Got to get to work." Then he turned and went away. I knew he went to the office room. Gerta looked in several rooms before going to the office. She tried the door to the office room very quietly and it was locked. She went to her own room and stayed there until dinner time.

At dinner time she came down. She was wearing a very low cut close fitting dress that left about half of each breast uncovered, and the outline of her body very obvious. She told me to go fetch Stuart. I had a key to the office just as I have keys to all the rooms. I have had them ever since I was taught how to use them.

I opened the door to the office and told Stuart he was to come to the dining room and eat. He looked as though he were going to refuse. I moved a step closer to him. I could feel the smell of fear on him, suddenly. He took a deep breath and said, "All right."

I did not enjoy dinner very much even though, on the surface, I was the center of attention. I have mastered the art of graceful eating with knife, fork and spoon as well as any human I have seen, though once in a great while I still break something, but not very often. I didn't break anything. I felt like it though, several times. Gerta asked me to recite some things, and all the time while I was reciting she kept leaning toward Stuart and saying things in a low voice. It was only so that her breasts would be exposed more. Stuart seemed not to like this and I think he didn't like it. He kept his eyes on me most of the time, but every minute or so he would dart a quick look at Gerta and breathe faster.

When dinner was over and the dishes slid into the waste chute Stuart started to leave the room. Gerta stood up and took a step after him, then said very sharply, "Stuart!" He stopped and turned toward her. She went across the room to him and stood less than a foot away from him. Then she took his hands and started to lift them. She intended to put them on her breasts the way they had been on the stairway. He jerked them away and said "No" several times. Then she put her arms around his neck too quickly for him to stop her. She planted her lips on his and refused to let go. He tried to pull her arms from around his neck.

I went over closer and watched. It was very interest-

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ing. Her fingernails dug into the back of his neck and brought blood. They struggled, or rather, he struggled, and after a little of this he got away from her and ran from the room. He had pushed her violently in getting away from her and she fell to the floor.

She sat there crying. I felt very sorry for her. I remembered how Stuart had picked her up when she stumbled on the stairway. I moved around behind her and stooped down. I quickly slid my arms under hers and put my hands on her breasts and lifted her to her feet.

I kept my hands on her breasts. I expected her to put hers over mine as she had Stuart's. She remained very quiet. I began to realize she wasn't going to put her hands over mine on her breasts. It didn't matter.

It was the first time I had touched any part of her except her hand. I was surprised at how warm and soft her breasts were. I was beginning to wonder why she was so quiet when she suddenly said, very softly, "Mr. Both, let go of me."

I let go of her. She stepped away from me and turned around and looked into my face. She seemed to be studying me. She was very white as though all the blood had left her skin.

Suddenly she ran a few steps toward the door, then stopped and bent over.

She lost her dinner. I think Stuart's coldness upset her.

January 17, 2357. My master Boris is back from First Colony and Stuart is gone. Stuart must have been quite hungry because he didn't come out of the office until my master returned from his trip. I tried to get in to him once. He had the door fixed in some way so that I couldn't get the key to work. It was all right after he left though. I used my key to make sure, and it worked.

Gerta pretended to be happy that my master was back. She clung to his arm all the time until Stuart left. Boris wanted Stuart to stay.

Stuart said good-bye to me last of all, and he shook hands with me. I do not like for anyone to shake hands with me. I do it because it is expected of me. But then, Stuart shook hands with me because it was expected of him. He smelled very strongly of fear while he did it. That is understandable. What I can't understand is why he feared Gerta. He was a very strange man, not

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at all like the others I have met.

My master arrived home tired but seemed to revive his spirits until he was even happier than he usually is. He kept studying Stuart's face and Gerta's face. I kept studying my master's face. For the first few minutes after his arrival the tiredness on his face was very evident. Suddenly his eyes widened and his smile appeared. It remained, shifting, so that at one time the corners of his smile turned upward, and at another time curved downward the way they do when Gerta is angry. After Stuart had left, my master turned to Gerta, his smile growing. Then he started laughing and couldn't seem to stop. He rocked back and forth, slapping his hands against his legs and laughing. He kept saying, "Oh, this is priceless." He said it several times. Gerta did not laugh. She did not get angry, either. Instead, she took my hand and said, "Come, Mr. Both, we will leave this clown to himself for a while."

I went along beside her for a few steps. Suddenly my master stopped laughing. He said, "Mr. Both, you will stay here with me."

I stopped. Gerta tugged at my hand and said, "No, Mr. Both. You will go with me."

I do not know how I could have obeyed one without disobeying the other one.

I obeyed Gerta.

January 21, 2357. Once I ran away. That was a long time ago. I returned to the place where I had lived in my wild state before I was captured. I do not remember why I ran away but I remember quite well why I came back.

I am human.

I do not like the things that make me doubt that I am human. That is why I do not like mirrors and never look in them. I do not like to shake hands, either, because then I am conscious of how different my hands are.

When I am only looking out of my eyes I am completely human. That is when I am happiest. I smile, and visualize the corners of my smile turning upward or curling downward with the changing mood of my happiness, my nose sharply bridged and with narrow nostrils, my forehead rising from twinkling blue eyes in a white expanse to a scalpline where long brown hair begins and is combed back. I stand, and visualize my legs long and straight, my feet small and

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narrow, and my arms as short slender instruments of my mind.

Then, to myself, I am entirely human. My thoughts run smoothly and are entirely in words. I talk without difficulty, and on any subject I am familiar with, and I am familiar with many. I match wits with people in conversation and hold my own, to their amazement.

A year ago one of the men who was present during one of the classroom sessions said something which appealed to me. He said, "Mr. Both, you are far more fortunate than ordinary humans. Your God is always present so that, little by little, day by day, you can create yourself in His image. Ordinary humans must create their God in their own image, and after they have done so they must pretend they did not create Him and that He created them in His image." I remembered that. Many times I have questioned guests about their God, and always I have seen that this man was right.

Only once did I tell someone what his God really was. He became angry and said, "I know my God exists and I can be like Him. You have no God at all. Your God is a man, and not a very good one at that. Even so, can you ever be like him? Look at yourself in a mirror. Look at your hands, your skin. *Look at them.*"

I was upset for a long time after that. My master Boris understood why I was upset. He told me, "Mr. Both, no one ever becomes completely like their God in every way. You become like Him in your own mind by not looking at your imperfections, by trying in the ways you can succeed to be like Him."

At another time my master said to me, "A man's God is too personal a thing to talk to him about without making him angry. If he is a good man he tries to be like his God in the privacy of his soul, and for you to pry into that is the same as trying to tear off his clothes and leave him naked for others to see."

When my master told me that, I understood at last about men's Gods and about men's clothes. I do not like to take my clothes off even in the presence of my master and reveal the scars from the operation. Of course the scars on my face and head cannot be concealed, but they are different. They are the symbol of my elevation to the status of a human, the scars from putting something in. Those

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others are the scars of removal and are ugly.

Sometimes when I am asleep I have dreams in which I am the way I used to be when I was an animal. At such times, in those dreams, I completely forget that I am human. When I awaken, for a moment I lay there, still in the dream, until I move to stretch or flex a part I no longer have. Then suddenly I am fully awake, but for the fraction of a second I try to return to the dream, to be the animal I once was.

Then I am filled with shame for my desire to be an animal. I throw off the covers and take a hot shower and put on fresh clothing and talk aloud to myself to hear words and be happy that I am human. By activity I drive out the old memories. Then I can look out from my eyes and be completely human, or more accurately, more like Boris. My master Boris is my God.

I do not know what his wife Gerta is.

January 25, 2357. Something terrible has happened and I can't understand why it has happened. I will start at the beginning, if there actually is a beginning. It started the day after my master Boris returned from First Colony and it may have to do with what I can't understand. I suspect it had to do with my going with Gerta when I had two opposing commands. The quarrel began with that, at any rate.

I did not see my master until the next day. He was not at dinner that night. Gerta and I ate alone. She said Boris was sulking. My own opinion is he was tired from his trip, and not hungry.

I spent the night reading and studying as I usually do during the sleep period of my master. (My own sleep period is once every four days and lasts almost a whole day, and corresponds to the period of natural darkness just as the sleep period of my master and his wife Gerta corresponds to the period that would be naturally dark on their home planet.) In the morning my master's bearing toward me was very different than it had ever been. I felt that I had done something to displease him, but when I asked him if that were so he denied it.

At dinner that evening I learned the truth. He was angry at Gerta for having issued a command to me in contradiction to his own command. She said it was the other way around, she had issued a command first and

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merely repeated it after he had issued a command violating hers. He said to her that she had issued the command for me to go with her to make him jealous. I do not understand this at all. He also said it was bad enough that she was a nymph, he could live with that from necessity, but anything worse would not go. A nymph is a female god according to the dictionary, who lives in a forest or a spring. I would think this should compliment Gerta if it were not that his tone of voice implied contempt. I have no idea what he meant and I feel a reluctance to ask him.

I'm sure Gerta knew what he meant though. She became very red in the face, then suddenly very white all over. Speaking very calmly and slowly, and looking at Boris, she said, "Getting at you might be a very good motive for something like that. I will keep it in mind, darling."

Boris said, "Or excuse?" But his good humor was restored. He was smiling, the corners of his smile turned down, his eyes very bright.

His becoming happy again seemed to have an upsetting effect on Gerta. She got up from the table and ran from the room. Boris and I finished the meal in silence.

I felt uneasy and didn't know why I should feel that way except that for the first time in my memory he would not take me with him on his rounds of the house. I tried to follow him but finally gave up.

I was unhappy and I grew lonely. I decided to go to Gerta. I went to her room and knocked on the door as I have been taught to do. She came to the door and let me in.

She did not let me stay long, and all the time I was there she talked rapidly and nervously, going from one subject to another with no connection of thought that I could see. She kept looking at me strangely, too. Often she would get very red, then as quickly very white, and stop talking for a moment. At the end of the half hour she told me to go. I went to the door. Then she said not to go. I turned around to come back, and she said for me to go, so I did. Since I cannot understand that, maybe it too has something to do with what has happened.

All this was making confusion in my thoughts when last I wrote in you, Mr. Diary, and I decided to write nothing to you about it, hoping the confusion would go away in time.

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I knew only one thing. I was unhappy and I would do anything I could to make my master pleased with me again. I did not know what I would do. I just watched and thought about it.

On January 22nd when I awakened from my sleep and went down into the house Gerta seemed to be her old self again, at least. She told me visitors were coming. She was very happy in anticipation. I felt a great sense of relief. She would enjoy the company and afterward she would go shopping every day and to parties at other houses in the evenings. My master Boris and I would be alone and we would return to the old way, with classes and study and discussion of all things.

The company came yesterday early in the afternoon. There were many people. Everyone was happy. Even I was happy. My master Boris seemed proud of me as he always does when there is company.

As always I watched people, anticipating their wishes often enough to amaze them. As always I tried to pick out the man Gerta would enjoy. I thought I had picked him out. He was a dark-haired man called Jimmy whose eyes followed her whenever she was in the room. Her eyes would meet his and I could smell that she liked him.

She did not behave as usual though. When Jimmy tried to get her alone she refused. I knew that my master wanted them to be together. Whenever Jimmy was with her, Boris would smile at Gerta. For some reason this disturbed her.

It occurred to me that perhaps the recent events that had confused me might have confused Gerta as well. Out of this thought came the suggestion of how I could please her and be once again in my master's good graces.

I thought carefully about it. I did not want to be wrong. I was sure I was not wrong. I waited until I could be alone with Jimmy for a moment. Then I told him what I knew to be true, that if he stood behind her and put his arms under hers and his hands on her breasts she would be very pleased. Jimmy's eyes grew very round for an instant, so I knew he had not thought of that manner of pleasing her until I told him. He thanked me and went back with the others.

I was very happy then. I expected everything to be the

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way it had always been. I followed Gerta around, waiting for Jimmy to come to her. That is why I missed whatever it was that took place. I heard my master call to me, saying, "Mr. Both, will you show Mr. and Mrs. Prentiss to the door?" I went to my master to obey. Mr. and Mrs. Prentiss had been here many times and had always been very friendly people. I wondered why they were leaving when the party had just begun.

When I reached them to escort them to the door Mr. Prentiss was saying to my master Boris, "I am sure there is no necessity of taking Mr. Both away from your wife to show us the way out."

My master Boris stopped smiling and said, "Never mind, Mr. Both, I will show them out myself."

I was very disappointed because I am very proud of my duty of conducting people through the house and opening doors for them. I concealed my hurt, but everyone around the room was looking at me strangely as though they sensed my hurt.

My master Boris came back after a few minutes and he was completely changed, as though he were insane. He did not enter the room at first, but stood in the doorway, his face very white. He looked around the room, and everyone in the room was looking at him except Gerta and Mr. and Mrs. Jones who had been in one corner of the room for quite a while, talking, and unaware of the change that seemed to have settled over everyone else.

Suddenly my master Boris spoke. He said, "Mr. Green." (That is Jimmy's other name.) "Come out into the hall with me."

Jimmy went to the doorway where my master Boris stood, and went past him into the hall. Boris followed him, closing the door. I turned to look across the room toward Gerta. One of the people was saying something which I couldn't hear to Mr. and Mrs. Jones. They left Gerta and went a few feet away, and talked together for a minute, then turned and looked at Gerta. They did not go back to her. Mrs. Jones said something to Gerta which I couldn't hear. Whatever it was, it had a very bad effect on Gerta. She ran to the center of the room and shouted, "Is that what you all think? It isn't true. Do you understand? It isn't true."

There was a loud bang from the direction of the

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door. I turned my head to see what had happened. My master Boris stood in the doorway again and I realized he had opened the door so violently it had slammed against the wall. He said, "All right. All of you. Get out of my house. I have something to do."

They were all moving toward the door. I knew what my duty was when a party was over. I did not know why it was suddenly over, but I would have to stand at the door and shake hands with everyone. I had only taken a few steps when my master Boris said, "Mr. Both, go to your room."

I did not know why he told me to go to my room, however, I obeyed. I had been in my room only a few seconds when I heard my master's footsteps on the stairway. I thought, "Now he will tell me everything and I will understand what has happened." Instead, the door did not open. I heard a sliding sound. I knew what it was, though it had not happened for a very long time. My master Boris had slid the bolt on the outside of the door.

Since then I have had to remain in my room because he has not moved the bolt back so the door can be opened. My food is pushed in through a small opening in the door next to the floor. It is my master Boris who brings my food. I know his footsteps on the stairway. I plead with him to let me out. I ask him what I have done wrong.

He never answers.

January 29, 2357. I am insane. My master Boris has said so, and the other men who looked into my room through the small opening at the bottom of the door agreed with him. I did not know what the word meant until I looked it up in my dictionary. Even then I did not understand until I had thought about it a great deal. Then I understood. I know they are right. Humans are sane, of course. If not all of them, then surely my master Boris. He is my God and whatever he does is right. When I cannot understand what he does, then I must be irrational.

I will prove it.

In my last sleep period I dreamed very vividly that I was as I had been before the operation. I was in my home grounds where I was captured. My huge tail, three times as long as my body and weighing twice as much, threshed in the shallow water. The net in which I was trapped was stout but my strong

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tail was able to break it in many places. My arms and legs, however, were caught through the net in such a manner that I could not get free. Then humans came, and a fine stream of liquid that wasn't water bathed my face, stinging my eyes. I fell asleep in my dreams, just as I did so long ago in waking consciousness.

When I awakened it was to my room, not to the dream. At first I did not know that. I slid out of bed to the floor with the old movements and started to move forward, but the movement caused me to flip over backwards because I had forgotten that I no longer have my enormous tail, just as I no longer have my middle legs.

Flipping over onto my back should not have hurt me, yet I almost lost consciousness from the pain that shot through me. I had been hurt, but not from flipping over onto my back. There were deep bruised streaks all over me as though I had been beaten with something long and thin and harder than my skin. My bones felt shattered.

Then I saw Gerta. She was lying on the floor in the same place where she is now. She had on no clothes. One of her arms was bent at a sharp angle where there was no joint for it to bend. Her hair was matted and wet and smelled of blood. Her eyes were open. She did not move, nor even breathe.

She is there even now as I write in you, Mr. Diary, yet I know it cannot be so because she is human and it is impossible for any human to be that way. Those who are not human can be that way. I have seen them. Humans never change. When I was operated on I was much smaller in my body than I am now. My body without the tail weighs more now than it did with the tail then. Yet during all the time I have lived since the operation Gerta has not changed at all until I saw her lying there.

It is inconceivable that humans could ever change in any way.

Then I heard my master Boris on the stairway, and also other footsteps. I heard my master, just outside the door. He said, "She is in there with it. I tried to save her but it attacked me and when I beat it off it grabbed her and ran up here."

Then a voice I did not recognize said, "Is it still in there?"

My master said, "I'll look."

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I saw the cover of the small opening at the bottom of the door open and my master Boris's eye appear. He looked around the room, and at me. I tried to speak to him but terrible pains in my face made me dizzy and weak. I reached up to see what was wrong with my face, and by gently touching my face in different spots I realized that the bone structure was completely shattered into many small bits, and without it I could not form words.

Though the pain made it difficult to see, I saw that my Master Boris was gone from the opening. I heard him say that it was still in here.

Another face appeared in the opening, then pulled away and the cover was closed. I heard another strange voice say, "It sure is. And it's killed your wife. We'll have to get a heavy gun and kill it."

For the first time in my memory I felt fear such as I have seen in humans.

It was then that my master Boris said, "Mr. Both must be insane." Two other voices said, "Mr. Both? Oh. Yes, of course."

Then I heard them go back down the stairway. I tried to call to them to take me with them but the sounds in my throat could not be altered by my shapeless face into words.

When I could hear their footsteps no longer my fear became almost more than I could bear. Gradually it grew less. But in a sense my fear gave me comfort, and in a strange way. I think now I understand about the Gods of humans. Let me see if I can explain to you. Much I do not understand, but a little I do.

Gerta was killed. Whoever killed her must have been very powerful since it would be almost impossible for any human to be killed. I can understand that.

I was beaten until very little is left to me, yet I did not wake up from my sleep while it was going on. That too is impossible. Such sleep has come to me only twice in my memory. The time I was captured in the net, and the time I went to sleep an animal and awakened after the operation. It must have been the same kind of sleep.

So whatever did these things must be much like a human, though more powerful. My master Boris looked in this room and saw it and said it was still here. Another man looked in and said he saw it. It must, therefore, be in here. I cannot see it at all, nor even smell it or hear it.

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At first I could not understand how that could possibly be. I wondered if they could mean me when they said "it." But that isn't possible because my master Boris saw whatever it is and knows it was not I. So there must be something in here that I can't see or hear or smell, and so powerful that I am helpless beside it. The only thing I can think of that could be like that, invisible and more powerful than I, is the God of some human.

So far, since my master Boris left, it has not touched me nor made its presence known. It has not disturbed me while I wrote this entry in you, Mr. Diary.

Now I must stop writing for a little while. I hear them on the stairway, my master Boris and some other humans. I will remain sitting here at my desk, it is so painful to move. I hear them at the door. In a moment they will be taking the cover off the opening at the bottom of the door. Then they will kill it.

Then I can be with my master Boris.

THE END

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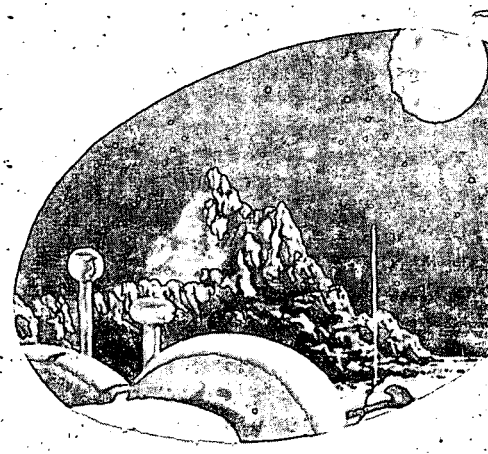

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